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A ROMAN SINGER

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CHAPTER I.

I, CORNELIO GRANDI, who tell you these things, have a story of my own, of which some of you are not ignorant. You know, for one thing, that I was not always poor, nor always a professor of philosophy, nor a scribbler of pedantic articles for a living. Many of you can remember why I was driven to sell my patrimony, the dear castello in the Sabines, with the good corn-land and the vineyards in the valley, and the olives, too. For I am not old yet; at least, Mariuccia is older, as I often tell her. These are queer times. It was not any fault of mine. But now that Nino is growing to be a famous man in the world, and people are saying good things and bad about him, and many say that he did wrong in this matter,

I think it best to tell you all the whole truth and what I think of it. For Nino is just like a son to me; I brought him up from a little child, and taught him Latin, and would have made a philosopher of him. What could I do? He had so much voice that he did not know what to do with it.

His mother used to sing. What a piece of a woman she was! She had a voice like a man's, and when De Pretis brought his singers to the festa once upon a time, when I was young, he heard her far down below, as we walked on the terrace of the palazzo, and asked me if I would not let him educate that young tenor. And when I told him it was one of the contadine, the wife of a tenant of mine, he would not believe it. But I never heard her sing after Serafino—that was her husband—was killed at the fair in Genazzano. And one day the fevers took her, and so she died, leaving Nino a little baby. Then you know what happened to me, about that time, and how I sold Castel Serveti and came to live here in Rome. Nino was brought to me here. One day in the autumn, a carrettiere from Ser-

veti, who would sometimes stop at my door and leave me a basket of grapes in the vintage, or a pitcher of fresh oil in winter, because he never used to pay his house-rent when I was his landlord—but he is a good fellow, Gigi—and so he tries to make amends now; well, as I was saying, he came one day and gave me a great basket of fine grapes, and he brought Nino with him, a little boy of scarce six years—just to show him to me, he said.

He was an ugly little boy, with a hat of no particular shape and a dirty face. He had great black eyes, with ink-saucers under them, *calamai*, as we say, just as he has now. Only the eyes are bigger now, and the circles deeper. But he is still sufficiently ugly. If it were not for his figure, which is pretty good, he could never have made a fortune with his voice. De Pretis says he could, but I do not believe it.

Well, I made Gigi come in with Nino, and Mariuccia made them each a great slice of toasted bread and spread it with oil, and gave Gigi a glass of the Serveti wine, and little Nino had some with water. And Mariuccia begged to have the

child left with her till Gigi went back the next day; for she is fond of children and comes from Serveti herself. And that is how Nino came to live with us. That old woman has no principles of economy, and she likes children.

"What does a little creature like that eat?" said she. "A bit of bread, a little soup—macchè! You will never notice it, I tell you. And the poor thing has been living on charity. Just imagine whether you are not quite as able to feed him as Gigi is!" So she persuaded me. But at first I did it to please her, for I told her our proverb, which says there can be nothing so untidy about a house as children and chickens. He was such a dirty little boy, with only one shoe and a battered hat, and he was always singing at the top of his voice and throwing things into the well in the cortile.

Mariuccia can read a little, though I never believed it until I found her one day teaching Nino his letters out of the *Vite dei Santi.* That was probably the first time that her reading was ever of any use to her, and the last, for I think she knows the *Lives of the Saints* by heart, and

she will certainly not venture to read a new book at her age. However, Nino very soon learned to know as much as she, and she will always be able to say that she laid the foundation of his education. He soon forgot to throw handfuls of mud into the well, and Mariuccia washed him, and I bought him a pair of shoes, and we made him look very decent. After a time he did not even remember to pull the cat's tail in the morning, so as to make her sing with him, as he said. When Mariuccia went to church she would take him with her, and he seemed very fond of going, so that I asked him one day if he would like to be priest when he grew up, and wear beautiful robes and have pretty little boys to wait on him with censers in their hands.

"No," said the little urchin, stoutly, "I won't be a priest." He found in his pocket a roast chestnut Mariuccia had given him, and began to shell it.

"Why are you always so fond of going to church, then?" I asked.

"If I were a big man," quoth he, "but really big, I would sing in church, like Maestro De Pretis."

"What would you sing, Nino?" said I, laugh-

ing. He looked very grave and got a piece of brown paper and folded it up. Then he began to beat time on my knees and sang out boldly, *Cornu ejus exaltabitur.*

It was enough to make one laugh, for he was only seven years old, and ugly too. But Mariuccia, who was knitting in the hall-way, called out that it was just what Maestro Ercole had sung the day before at vespers, every syllable.

I have an old piano in my sitting-room. It is a masterpiece of an instrument, I can tell you; for one of the legs is gone and I propped it up with two empty boxes, and the keys are all black except those that have lost the ivory—and those are green. It has also five pedals, disposed as a harp underneath; but none of them make any impression on the sound, except the middle one, which rings a bell. The sound-board has a crack in it somewhere, Nino says, and two of the notes are dumb since the great German maestro came home with my boy one night, and insisted on playing an accompaniment after supper. We had stewed chickens and a flask of Cesanese, I remember, and I knew something would happen

to the piano. But Nino would never have any other, for De Pretis has a very good one; and Nino studies without anything—just a common tuning-fork that he carries in his pocket. But the old piano was the beginning of his fame. He got into the sitting-room one day, by himself, and found out that he could make a noise by striking the keys, and then he discovered that he could make tunes, and pick out the ones that were always ringing in his head. After that he could hardly be dragged away from it, so that I sent him to school to have some quiet in the house.

He was a clever boy, and I taught him Latin and gave him our poets to read; and as he grew up I would have made a scholar of him, but he would not. At least, he was always willing to learn and to read; but he was always singing too. Once I caught him declaiming "Arma virumque cano" to an air from Trovatore, and I knew he could never be a scholar then, though he might know a great deal. Besides, he always preferred Dante to Virgil, and Leopardi to Horace.

One day, when he was sixteen or thereabouts, he was making a noise, as usual, shouting some

motive or other to Mariuccia and the cat, while I was labouring to collect my senses over a lecture I had to prepare. Suddenly his voice cracked horribly and his singing ended in a sort of groan. It happened again once or twice, the next day, and then the house was quiet. I found him at night asleep over the old piano, his eyes all wet with tears.

"What is the matter, Nino?" I asked. "It is time for youngsters like you to be in bed."

"Ah, Messer Cornelio," he said, when he was awake, "I had better go to bed, as you say. I shall never sing again, for my voice is all broken to pieces;" and he sobbed bitterly.

"The saints be praised," thought I; "I shall make a philosopher of you yet!"

But he would not be comforted, and for several months he went about as if he were trying to find the moon, as we say; and though he read his books and made progress, he was always sad and wretched, and grew much thinner, so that Mariuccia said he was consuming himself, and I thought he must be in love. But the house was very quiet.

I thought as he did, that he would never sing again, but I never talked to him about it, lest he should try, now that he was as quiet as a nightingale with its tongue cut out. But nature meant differently, I suppose. One day De Pretis came to see me; it must have been near the new year, for he never came often at that time. It was only a friendly recollection of the days when I had a castello and a church of my own at Serveti, and used to have him come from Rome to sing at the festa, and he came every year to see me; and his head grew bald as mine grew gray, so that at last he wears a black skull-cap everywhere, like a priest, and only takes it off when he sings the Gloria Patri, or at the Elevation. However, he came to see me, and Nino sat mutely by, as we smoked a little and drank the syrup of violets with water that Mariuccia brought us. It was one of her eternal extravagances, but somehow, though she never understood the value of economy, my professorship brought in more than enough for us, and it was not long after this that I began to buy the bit of vineyard out of Porta Salara, by instal-

ments from my savings. And since then we have our own wine.

De Pretis was talking to me about a new opera that he had heard. He never sang except in church, of course, but he used to go to the theatre of an evening; so it was quite natural that he should go to the piano and begin to sing a snatch of the tenor air to me, explaining the situation as he went along, between his singing.

Nino could not sit still, and went and leaned over Sor Ercole, as we call the maestro, hanging on the notes, not daring to try and sing, for he had lost his voice, but making the words with his lips.

"Dio mio!" he cried at last, "how I wish I could sing that!"

"Try it," said De Pretis, laughing and half interested by the boy's earnest look. "Try it—I will sing it again." But Nino's face fell.

"It is no use," he said. "My voice is all broken to pieces now, because I sang too much before."

"Perhaps it will come back," said the musician kindly, seeing the tears in the young fellow's eyes.

"See, we will try a scale." He struck a chord. "Now, open your mouth—so—Do-o-o-o!" He sang a long note. Nino could not resist any longer, whether he had any voice or not. He blushed red and turned away, but he opened his mouth and made a sound.

"Do-o-o-o!" He sang like the master, but much weaker.

"Not so bad; now the next, Re-e-e!" Nino followed him. And so on, up the scale.

After a few more notes, De Pretis ceased to smile, and cried, "Go on, go on!" after every note, authoritatively, and in quite a different manner from his first kindly encouragement. Nino, who had not sung for months, took courage and a long breath, and went on as he was bid, his voice gaining volume and clearness as he sang higher. Then De Pretis stopped and looked at him earnestly.

"You are mad," he said. "You have not lost your voice at all."

"It was quite different when I used to sing before," said the boy.

"Per Bacco, I should think so," said the

maestro. "Your voice has changed. Sing something, can't you?"

Nino sang a church air he had caught somewhere. I never heard such a voice, but it gave me a queer sensation that I liked—it was so true, and young, and clear. De Pretis sat open-mouthed with astonishment and admiration. When the boy had finished, he stood looking at the maestro, blushing very scarlet, and altogether ashamed of himself. The other did not speak.

"Excuse me," said Nino, "I cannot sing. I have not sung for a long time. I know it is not worth anything." De Pretis recovered himself.

"You do not sing," said he, "because you have not learned. But you can. If you will let me teach you, I will do it for nothing."

"Me!" screamed Nino, "you teach *me!* Ah, if it were any use—if you only would!"

"Any use?" repeated De Pretis half aloud, as he bit his long black cigar half through in his excitement. "Any use? My dear boy, do you know that you have a very good voice? A remarkable voice," he continued, carried away by

his admiration, "such a voice as I have never heard. You can be the first tenor of your age, if you please—in three years you will sing anything you like, and go to London and Paris, and be a great man. Leave it to me."

I protested that it was all nonsense, that Nino was meant for a scholar and not for the stage, and I was quite angry with De Pretis for putting such ideas into the boy's head. But it was of no use. You cannot argue with women and singers, and they always get their own way in the end. And whether I liked it or not, Nino began to go to Sor Ercole's house once or twice a week, and sang scales and exercises very patiently, and copied music in the evening, because he said he would not be dependent on me, since he could not follow my wishes in choosing a profession. De Pretis did not praise him much to his face after they had begun to study, but he felt sure he would succeed.

"Caro Conte,"—he often calls me Count, though I am only plain Professore, now—"he has a voice like a trumpet and the patience of all the angels. He will be a great singer."

"Well, it is not my fault," I used to answer; for what could I do?

When you see Nino now, you cannot imagine that he was ever a dirty little boy from the mountains, with one shoe, and that infamous little hat. I think he is ugly still, though you do not think so when he is singing, and he has good strong limbs and broad shoulders, and carries himself like a soldier. Besides, he is always very well dressed, though he has no affectations. He does not wear his hair plastered into a love-lock on his forehead, like some of our dandies, nor is he eternally pulling a pair of monstrous white cuffs over his hands. Everything is very neat about him and very quiet, so that you would hardly think he was an artist after all; and he talks but little, though he can talk very well when he likes, for he has not forgotten his Dante nor his Leopardi. De Pretis says the reason he sings so well is because he has a mouth like the slit in an organ pipe, as wide as a letter-box at the post-office. But I think he has succeeded because he has great square jaws like Napoleon. People like that

always succeed. My jaw is small, and my chin is pointed under my beard—but then, with the beard, no one can see it. But Mariuccia knows.

Nino is a thoroughly good boy, and until a year ago he never cared for anything but his art; and now he cares for something, I think, a great deal better than art, even than art like his. But he is a singer still, and always will be, for he has an iron throat, and never was hoarse in his life. All those years when he was growing up, he never had a love-scrape, or owed money, or wasted his time in the caffè.

"Take care," Mariuccia used to say to me, "if he ever takes a fancy to some girl with blue eyes and fair hair he will be perfectly crazy. Ah, Sor Conte, *she* had blue eyes, and her hair was like the corn-silk. How many years is that, Sor Conte mio?" Mariuccia is an old witch.

I am writing this story to tell you why Mariuccia is a witch, and why my Nino, who never so much as looked at the beauties of the generone, as they came with their fathers and brothers and mothers to eat ice-cream in the Piazza Colonna, and listen to the music of a

summer's evening,—Nino, who stared absently at the great ladies as they rolled over the Pincio in their carriages, and was whistling airs to himself for practice when he strolled along the Corso, instead of looking out for pretty faces,—Nino, the cold in all things save in music, why he fulfilled Mariuccia's prophecy, little by little, and became perfectly crazy about blue eyes and fair hair. That is what I am going to tell you, if you have the leisure to listen. And you ought to know it, because evil tongues are more plentiful than good voices in Rome, as elsewhere, and people are saying many spiteful things about him,—though they clap loudly enough at the theatre when he sings.

He is like a son to me, and perhaps I am reconciled, after all, to his not having become a philosopher. He would never have been so famous as he is now, and he really knows so much more than Maestro De Pretis—in other ways than music—that he is very presentable indeed. What is blood, nowadays? What difference does it make to society whether Nino Cardegna, the tenor, was the son of a vine-dresser? Or

what does the University care for the fact that I, Cornelio Grandi, am the last of a race as old as the Colonnas, and quite as honourable? What does Mariuccia care? What does anybody care? Corpo di Bacco! if we begin talking of race we shall waste as much time as would make us all great celebrities! I am not a celebrity —I never shall be now, for a man must begin at that trade young. It is a profession—being celebrated—and it has its signal advantages. Nino will tell you so, and he has tried it. But one must begin young, very young! I cannot begin again.

And then, as you all know, I never began at all. I took up life in the middle, and am trying hard to twist a rope of which I never held the other end. I feel sometimes as though it must be the life of another that I have taken, leaving my own unfinished, for I was never meant to be a professor. That is the way of it; and if I am sad and inclined to melancholy humours, it is because I miss my old self, and he seems to have left me without even a kindly word at parting. I was fond of my old self, but I did not respect

him much. And my present self I respect, without fondness. Is that metaphysics? Who knows? It is vanity in either case, and the vanity of self-respect is perhaps a more dangerous thing than the vanity of self-love, though you may call it pride if you like, or give it any other high-sounding title. But the heart of the vain man is lighter than the heart of the proud. Probably Nino has always had much self-respect, but I doubt if it has made him very happy—until lately. True, he has genius, and does what he must by nature do or die, whereas I have not even talent, and I make myself do for a living what I can never do well. What does it serve, to make comparisons? I could never have been like Nino, though I believe half my pleasure of late has been in fancying how I should feel in his place, and living through his triumphs by my imagination. Nino began at the very beginning, and when all his capital was one shoe and a ragged hat, and certainly not more than a third of a shirt, he said he would be a great singer; and he is, though he is scarcely of age yet. I wish it had been some-

thing else than a singer, but since he is the first already, it was worth while. He would have been great in anything, though, for he has such a square jaw, and he looks so fierce when anything needs to be overcome. Our forefathers must have looked like that, with their broad eagle noses and iron mouths. They began at the beginning, too, and they went to the very end. I wish Nino had been a general, or a statesman, or a cardinal, or all three like Richelieu.

But you want to hear of Nino, and you can pass on your ways, all of you, without hearing my reflections and small-talk about goodness, and success, and the like. Moreover, since I respect myself now, I must not find so much fault with my own doings, or you will say that I am in my dotage. And, truly, Nino Cardegna is a better man, for all his peasant blood, than I ever was; a better lover, and perhaps a better hater. There is his guitar, that he always leaves here, and it reminds me of him and his ways. Fourteen years he lived here with me, from child to boy and from boy to man, and now he is gone, never to live here any more. The end of it will be

that I shall go and live with him, and Mariuccia will take her cat and her knitting, and her *Lives of the Saints* back to Serveti, to end her life in peace, where there are no professors and no singers. For Mariuccia is older than I am, and she will die before me. At all events, she will take her tongue with her, and ruin herself at her convenience without ruining me. I wonder what life would be without Mariuccia? Would anybody darn my stockings, or save the peel of the mandarins to make cordial? I certainly would not have the mandarins, if she were gone—it is a luxury. No, I would not have them. But then, there would be no cordial, and I should have to buy new stockings every year or two. No, the mandarins cost less than the stockings —and—well, I suppose I am fond of Mariuccia.

CHAPTER II.

It was really not so long ago—only one year. The sirocco was blowing up and down the streets, and about the corners, with its sickening blast, making us all feel like dead people, and hiding away the sun from us. It is no use trying to do anything when it blows sirocco, at least for us who are born here. But I had been persuaded to go with Nino to the house of Sor Ercole to hear my boy sing the opera he had last studied, and so I put my cloak over my shoulders, and wrapped its folds over my breast, and covered my mouth, and we went out. For it was a cold sirocco, bringing showers of tepid rain from the south, and the drops seemed to chill themselves as they fell. One moment you are in danger of being too cold, and the next minute the perspiration stands on your forehead, and you are oppressed

with a moist heat. Like the prophet, when it blows a real sirocco you feel as if you were poured out like water, and all your bones were out of joint. Foreigners do not feel it until they have lived with us a few years, but Romans are like dead men when the wind is in that quarter.

I went to the maestro's house and sat for two hours listening to the singing. Nino sang very creditably, I thought, but I allow that I was not as attentive as I might have been, for I was chilled and uncomfortable. Nevertheless, I tried to be very appreciative, and I complimented the boy on the great progress he had made. When I thought of it, it struck me that I had never heard anybody sing like that before; but still there was something lacking; I thought it sounded a little unreal, and I said to myself that he would get admiration, but never any sympathy. So clear, so true, so rich it was, but wanting a ring to it, the little thrill that goes to the heart. He sings very differently now.

Maestro Ercole de Pretis lives in the Via Paola, close to the Ponte Sant' Angelo, in a most decent little house—that is, of course, on a floor

of a house, as we all do. But De Pretis is well-to-do, and he has a marble door-plate, engraved in black with his name, and two sitting-rooms. They are not very large rooms, it is true, but in one of them he gives his lessons, and the grand piano fills it up entirely, so that you can only sit on the little black horsehair sofa at the end, and it is very hard to get past the piano on either side. Ercole is as broad as he is long, and takes snuff when he is not smoking. But it never hurts his voice.

It was Sunday, I remember, for he had to sing in St. Peter's in the afternoon; and it was so near, we walked over with him. Nino had never lost his love for church music, though he had made up his mind that it was a much finer thing to be a primo tenore assoluto at the Apollo Theatre than to sing in the Pope's choir for thirty scudi a month. We walked along over the bridge, and through the Borgo Nuovo, and across the Piazza Rusticucci, and then we skirted the colonnade on the left, and entered the church by the sacristy, leaving De Pretis there to put on his purple cassock and his white cotta. Then we

went into the Capella del Coro to wait for the vespers.

All sorts of people go to St. Peter's on Sunday afternoon, but they are mostly foreigners, and bring strange little folding chairs, and arrange themselves to listen to the music as though it were a concert. Now and then one of the young gentlemen-in-waiting from the Vatican strolls in and says his prayers, and there is an old woman, very ragged and miserable, who has haunted the chapel of the choir for many years, and sits with perfect unconcern, telling her beads at the foot of the great reading-desk that stands out in the middle and is never used. Great ladies crowd in through the gate when Raimondi's hymn is to be sung, and disreputable artists make sketches surreptitiously during the benediction, without the slightest pretence at any devotion that I can see. The lights shine out more brightly as the day wanes, and the incense curls up as the little boys swing the censers, and the priests and canons chant, and the choir answers from the organ loft; and the crowd looks on, some saying their prayers, some pretending to, and some look-

ing about for the friend or lover they have come to meet.

That evening when we went over together, I found myself pushed against a tall man with an immense gray moustache standing out across his face like the horns of a beetle. He looked down on me from time to time, and when I apologised for crowding him his face flushed a little, and he tried to bow as well as he could in the press, and said something with a German accent which seemed to be courteous. But I was separated from Nino by him. Maestro Ercole sang, and all the others, turn and turn about, and so at last it came to the benediction. The tall old foreigner stood erect and unbending, but most of the people around him kneeled. As the crowd sank down I saw that on the other side of him sat a lady on a small folding stool, her feet crossed one over the other, and her hands folded on her knees. She was dressed entirely in black, and her fair face stood out wonderfully clear and bright against the darkness. Truly she looked more like an angel than a woman, though perhaps you will think she is not so beautiful after all, for she is so unlike

our Roman ladies. She has a delicate nose, full of sentiment, and pointed a little downward for pride; she has deep blue eyes, wide apart and dreamy, and a little shaded by brows that are quite level and even, with a straight pencilling over them, that looks really as if it were painted. Her lips are very red and gentle, and her face is very white, so that the little ringlet that has escaped control looks like a gold tracery on a white marble ground.

And there she sat, with the last light from the tall windows and the first from the great wax candles shining on her, while all around seemed dark by contrast. She looked like an angel; and quite as cold, perhaps most of you would say. Diamonds are cold things, too, but they shine in the dark; whereas a bit of glass just lets the light through it, even if it is coloured red and green and put in a church window, and looks ever so much warmer than the diamond.

But though I saw her beauty and the light of her face, all in a moment, as though it had been a dream, I saw Nino too; for I had missed him, and had supposed he had gone to the organ loft

with De Pretis. But now, as the people kneeled to the benediction, imagine a little what he did! he just dropped on his knees with his face to the white lady, and his back to the procession; it was really disgraceful, and if it had been lighter I am sure every one would have noticed it. At all events, there he knelt, not three feet from the lady, looking at her as if his heart would break. But I do not believe she saw him, for she never looked his way. Afterwards everybody got up again, and we hurried to get out of the Chapel; but I noticed that the tall old foreigner gave his arm to the beautiful lady, and when they had pushed their way through the gate that leads into the body of the church, they did not go away, but stood aside for the crowd to pass. Nino said he would wait for De Pretis, and immediately turned his whole attention to the foreign girl, hiding himself in the shadow and never taking his eyes from her.

I never saw Nino look at a woman before as though she interested him in the least, or I would not have been surprised now to see him lost in admiration of the fair girl. I was close to him

and could see his face, and it had a new expression on it that I did not know. The people were almost gone and the lights were being extinguished when De Pretis came round the corner, looking for us. But I was astonished to see him bow low to the foreigner and the young lady, and then stop and enter into conversation with them. They spoke quite audibly, and it was about a lesson that the young lady had missed. She spoke like a Roman, but the old gentleman made himself understood in a series of stiff phrases, which he fired out of his mouth like discharges of musketry.

"Who are they?" whispered Nino to me, breathless with excitement and trembling from head to foot. "Who are they, and how does the maestro know them?"

"Eh, caro mio, what am I to know?" I answered indifferently. "They are some foreigners, some pupil of De Pretis, and her father. How should I know?"

"She is a Roman," said Nino between his teeth. "I have heard foreigners talk. The old man is a foreigner, but she—she is Roman," he repeated with certainty.

"Eh," said I, "for my part she may be Chinese. The stars will not fall on that account." You see, I thought he had seen her before, and I wanted to exasperate him by my indifference so that he should tell me; but he would not, and indeed I found out afterwards that he had really never seen her before.

Presently the lady and gentleman went away, and we called De Pretis, for he could not see us in the gloom. Nino became very confidential and linked an arm in his as we went away.

"Who are they, caro maestro, these enchanting people?" inquired the boy when they had gone a few steps, and I was walking by Nino's side, and we were all three nearing the door.

"Foreigners,—my foreigners," returned the singer, proudly, as he took a colossal pinch of snuff. He seemed to say that he in his profession was constantly thrown with people like that, whereas I—oh, I, of course, was always occupied with students and poor devils who had no voice, nothing but brains.

"But she," objected Nino,—"she is Roman, I am sure of it."

"Eh," said Ercole, "you know how it is. These foreigners marry and come here and live, and their children are born here; and they grow up and call themselves Romans, as proudly as you please. But they are not really Italians, any more than the Shah of Persia." The maestro smiled a pitying smile. He is a Roman of Rome, and his great nose scorns pretenders. In his view Piedmontese, Tuscans, and Neapolitans are as much foreigners as the Germans or the English. More so, for he likes the Germans and tolerates the English, but he can call an enemy by no worse name than "Napoletano" or "Piemontese."

"Then they live here?" cried Nino in delight.

"Surely."

"In fine, maestro mio, who are they?"

"What a diavolo of a boy! Dio mio!" and Ercole laughed under his big moustache, which is black still. But he is bald, all the same, and wears a skull-cap.

"Diavolo as much as you please, but I will know," said Nino sullenly.

"Oh bene! Now do not disquiet yourself, Nino—I will tell you all about them. She is a

pupil of mine, and I go to their house in the Corso and give her lessons."

"And then?" asked Nino impatiently.

"Who goes slowly goes surely," said the maestro sententiously; and he stopped to light a cigar as black and twisted as his moustache. Then he continued, standing still in the middle of the piazza to talk at his ease, for it had stopped raining and the air was moist and sultry, "They are Prussians, you must know. The old man is a colonel, retired, pensioned, everything you like, wounded at Königgratz by the Austrians. His wife was delicate, and he brought her to live here long before he left the service, and the signorina was born here. He has told me about it, and he taught me to pronounce the name Königgratz, so—Conigherazzo," said the maestro proudly, "and that is how I know."

"Capperi! What a mouthful," said I.

"You may well say that, Sor Conte, but singing teaches us all languages. You would have found it of great use in your studies." I pictured to myself a quarter of an hour of Schopenhauer, with a piano accompaniment and some one beating time.

"But their name, their name I want to know," objected Nino, as he stepped aside and flattened himself against the pillar to let a carriage pass. As luck would have it, the old officer and his daughter were in that very cab, and Nino could just make them out by the evening twilight. He took off his hat, of course, but I am quite sure they did not see him.

"Well, their name is prettier than Conigherazzo," said Ercole. It is Lira—Erre Gheraffe fonne Lira." (Herr Graf von Lira, I suppose he meant. And he has the impudence to assert that singing has taught him to pronounce German.) "And that means," he continued, "Il Conte di Lira, as we should say."

"Ah! what a divine appellation!" exclaimed Nino enthusiastically, pulling his hat over his eyes to meditate upon the name at his leisure.

"And her name is Edvigia," volunteered the maestro. That is the Italian for Hedwig, or Hadwig, you know. But we should shorten it and call her Gigia, just as though she were Luisa. Nino does not think it so pretty. Nino was silent. Perhaps he was already shy of repeating

the familiar name of the first woman he had ever loved. Imagine! At twenty he had never been in love! It is incredible to me,—and one of our own people, too, born at Serveti.

Meanwhile the maestro's cigar had gone out, and he lit it with a blazing sulphur match before he continued; and we all walked on again. I remember it all very distinctly, because it was the beginning of Nino's madness. Especially I call to mind his expression of indifference when Ercole began to descant upon the worldly possessions of the Lira household. It seemed to me that if Nino so seriously cast his eyes on the Contessina Edvigia, he might at least have looked pleased to hear she was so rich; or he might have looked disappointed, if he thought that her position was an obstacle in his way. But he did not care about it at all, and walked straight on, humming a little tune through his nose with his mouth shut, for he does everything to a tune.

"They are certainly gran' signor," Ercole said. "They live on the first floor of the Palazzo Carmandola,—you know, in the Corso—and they have a carriage, and keep two men in livery, just

like a Roman prince. Besides, the count once sent me a bottle of wine at Christmas. It was as weak as water, and tasted like the solfatara of Tivoli, but it came from his own vineyard in Germany, and was at least fifty years old. If he has a vineyard, he has a castello, of course. And if he has a castello, he is a gran' signor,—eh? what do you think, Sor Conte? You know about such things."

"I did once, maestro mio. It is very likely."

"And as for the wine being sour, it was because it was so old. I am sure the Germans cannot make wine well. They are not used to drinking it good, or they would not drink so much when they come here." We were crossing the bridge, and nearing Ercole's house.

"Maestro," said Nino, suddenly. He had not spoken for some time, and he had finished his tune.

"Well?"

"Is not to-morrow our day for studying?"

"Diavolo! I gave you two hours to-day. Have you forgotten?"

"Ah,—it is true. But give me a lesson to-

morrow, like a good maestro as you are. I will sing like an angel if you will give me a lesson to-morrow."

"Well, if you like to come at seven in the morning, and if you promise to sing nothing but solfeggi of Bordogni for an hour, and not to strain your voice, or put too much vinegar in your salad at supper, I will think about it, Does that please you? Conte, don't let him eat too much vinegar."

"I will do all that, if I may come," said Nino, readily, though he would rather not sing at all, at most times, than sing Bordogni, De Pretis tells me.

"Meglio cosi,—so much the better. Good-night, Sor Conte. Good-night, Nino." And so he turned down the Via Paola, and Nino and I went our way. I stopped to buy a cigar at the little tobacco shop just opposite the Tordinona Theatre. They used to be only a baiocco apiece, and I could get one at a time. But now they are two for three baiocchi; and so I have to get two always, because there are no half baiocchi any more—nothing but centimes. That is one of the sources of my extravagance. Mariuccia

says I am miserly; she was born poor, and never had to learn the principles of economy.

"Nino mio," I said, as we went along, "you really make me laugh."

"Which is to say ——" He was humming a tune again, and was cross because I interrupted him.

"You are in love. Do not deny it. You are already planning how you can make the acquaintance of the foreign contessa. You are a fool. Go home, and get Mariuccia to give you some syrup of tamarind to cool your blood."

"Well? Now tell me, were you never in love with any one yourself?" he asked, by way of answer; and I could see the fierce look come into his eyes in the dark as he said it.

"Altro,—that is why I laugh at you. When I was your age I had been in love twenty times. But I never fell in love at first sight—and with a doll; really a wax doll, you know, like the Madonna in the presepio that they set up at the Ara Cœli, at Epiphany."

"A doll!" he cried. "Who is a doll, if you please?" We stopped at the corner of the street to argue it out.

"Do you think she is really alive?" I asked, laughing. Nino disdained to answer me, but he looked savagely from under the brim of his hat. "Look here," I continued, "women like that are only made to be looked at. They never love, for they have no hearts. It is lucky if they have souls, like Christians."

"I will tell you what I think," said he stoutly; "she is an angel."

"Oh! is that all? Did you ever hear of an angel being married?"

"You shall hear of it, Sor Cornelio, and before long. I swear to you, here, that I will marry the Contessina di Lira—if that is her name—before two years are out. Ah, you do not believe me. Very well. I have nothing more to say."

"My dear son," said I,—for he is a son to me,—"you are talking nonsense. How can anybody in your position hope to marry a great lady, who is an heiress? Is it not true that it is all stuff and nonsense?"

"No, it is not true," cried Nino, setting his square jaw like a bit and speaking through his

teeth. "I am ugly, you say; I am dark, and I have no position, or wealth, or anything of the kind. I am the son of a peasant and of a peasant's wife. I am anything you please, but I will marry her if I say I will. Do you think it is for nothing that you have taught me the language of Dante, of Petrarca, of Silvio Pellico? Do you think it is for nothing that Heaven has given me my voice? Do not the angels love music, and cannot I make as good songs as they? Or do you think that because I am bred a singer my hand is not as strong as a fine gentleman's —contadino as I am? I will—I will and I will, Basta!"

I never saw him look like that before. He had folded his arms, and he nodded his head a little at each repetition of the word, looking at me so hard, as we stood under the gas lamp in the street, that I was obliged to turn my eyes away. He stared me out of countenance—he, a peasant boy! Then we walked on.

"And as for her being a wax doll, as you call her," he continued, after a little time, "that is nonsense, if you want the word to be used.

Truly, a doll! And the next minute you compare her to the Madonna! I am sure she has a heart as big as this," and he stretched out his hands into the air. "I can see it in her eyes. Ah, what eyes!"

I saw it was no use arguing on that tack, and I felt quite sure that he would forget all about it, though he looked so determined, and talked so grandly about his will.

"Nino," I said, "I am older than you." I said this to impress him, of course, for I am not really so very old.

"Diamini!" he cried, impertinently, "I believe it!"

"Well, well, do not be impatient. I have seen something in my time, and I tell you those foreign women are not like ours, a whit. I fell in love, once, with a northern fairy,—she was not German, but she came from Lombardy, you see,—and that is the reason why I lost Serveti and all the rest."

"But I have no Serveti to lose," objected Nino.

"You have a career as a musician to lose. It is not much of a career to be stamping about

with a lot of figuranti and scene-shifters, and screaming yourself hoarse every night." I was angry because he laughed at my age. "But it is a career, after all, that you have chosen for yourself. If you get mixed up in an intrigue now, you may ruin yourself. I hope you will."

"Grazie! And then?"

"Eh, it might not be such a bad thing after all. For if you could be induced to give up the stage——"

"I—*I* give up singing?" he cried, indignantly.

"Oh, such things happen, you know. If you were to give it up, as I was saying, you might then possibly use your mind. A mind is a much better thing than a throat, after all."

"Ebbene! talk as much as you please, for, of course, you have the right, for you have brought me up, and you have certainly opposed my singing enough to quiet your conscience. But, dear professor, I will do all that I say, and if you will give me a little help in this matter, you will not repent it."

"Help? Dio mio! What do you take me for? As if I could help you, or would! I sup-

pose you want money to make yourself a dandy, a paino, to go and stand at the corner of the Piazza Colonna and ogle her as she goes by! In truth! You have fine projects."

"No," said Nino, quietly, "I do not want any money or anything else at present, thank you. And do not be angry, but come into the caffè and drink some lemonade; and I will invite you to it, for I have been paid for my last copying that I sent in yesterday." He put his arm in mine, and we went in. There is no resisting Nino when he is affectionate. But I would not let him pay for the lemonade. I paid for it myself. What extravagance!

CHAPTER III.

Now I ought to tell you that many things in this story were only told me quite lately, for at first I would not help Nino at all, thinking it was but a foolish fancy of his boy's heart and would soon pass. I have tried to gather and to order all the different incidents into one harmonious whole, so that you can follow the story; and you must not wonder that I can describe some things that I did not see, and that I know how some of the people felt; for Nino and I have talked over the whole matter very often, and the baroness came here and told me her share, though I wonder how she could talk so plainly of what must have given her so much pain. But it was very kind of her to come; and she sat over there in the old green arm-chair, by the glass case that has the artificial flowers

under it, and the sugar lamb that the padre curato gave Nino when he made his first communion at Easter. However, it is not time to speak of the baroness yet, but I cannot forget her.

Nino was very amusing when he began to love the young countess, and the very first morning—the day after we had been to St. Peter's—he went out at half-past six, though it was only just sunrise, for we were in October. I knew very well that he was going for his extra lesson with De Pretis, but I had nothing to say about it, and I only recommended him to cover himself well, for the sirocco had passed and it was a bright morning, with a clear tramontana wind blowing fresh from the north. I can always tell when it is a tramontana wind before I open my window, for Mariuccia makes such a clattering with the coffee-pot in the kitchen, and the goldfinch in the sitting-room sings very loud; which he never does if it is cloudy. Nino, then, went off to Maestro Ercole's house for his singing, and this is what happened there.

De Pretis knew perfectly well that Nino had

only asked for the extra lesson in order to get a chance of talking about the Contessina di Lira, and so, to tease him, as soon as he appeared, the maestro made a great bustle about singing scales, and insisted upon beginning at once. Moreover, he pretended to be in a bad humour; and that is always pretence with him.

"Ah, my little tenor," he began; "you want a lesson at seven in the morning, do you? That is the time when all the washerwomen sing at the fountain! Well, you shall have a lesson, and by the body of Bacchus it shall be a real lesson! Now, then! Andiamo—Do-o-o!" and he roared out a great note that made the room shake, and a man who was selling cabbage in the street stopped his hand-cart and mimicked him for five minutes.

"But I am out of breath, maestro," protested Nino, who wanted to talk.

"Out of breath? A singer is never out of breath. Absurd! What would you do if you got out of breath, say, in the last act of Lucia, so—Bell' alma ado —— Then your breath ends, eh? Will you stay with the 'adored soul'

between your teeth? A fine singer you will make! Andiamo! Do-o-o!"

Nino saw he must begin, and he set up a shout, much against his will, so that the cabbage-vender chimed in, making so much noise that the old woman who lives opposite opened her window and emptied a great dustpan full of potato peelings and refuse leaves of lettuce right on his head. And then there was a great noise. But the maestro paid no attention, and went on with the scale, hardly giving Nino time to breathe. Nino, who stood behind De Pretis while he sang, saw the copy of Bordogni's solfeggi lying on a chair, and managed to slip it under a pile of music near by, singing so lustily all the while that the maestro never looked round.

When he got to the end of the scale Ercole began hunting for the music, and as he could not find it, Nino asked him questions.

"Can she sing,—this contessina of yours, maestro?" De Pretis was overturning everything in his search.

"An apoplexy on those solfeggi and on the

man who made them!" he cried. "Sing, did you say? Yes, a great deal better than you ever will. Why can you not look for your music, instead of chattering?" Nino began to look where he knew it was not.

"By the by, do you give her lessons every day?" asked the boy.

"Every day? Am I crazy, to ruin people's voices like that?"

"Caro maestro, what is the matter with you, this morning? You have forgotten to say your prayers!"

"You are a donkey, Nino; here he is, this blessed Bordogni,—now come."

"Sor Ercole mio," said Nino in despair, "I must really know something about this angel, before I sing at all." Ercole sat down on the piano stool, and puffed up his cheeks, and heaved a tremendous sigh, to show how utterly bored he was by his pupil. Then he took a large pinch of snuff, and sighed again.

"What demon have you got into your head?" he asked, at length.

"What angel, you mean," answered Nino,

delighted at having forced the maestro to a parley. "I am in love with her—crazy about her," he cried, running his fingers through his curly hair, "and you must help me to see her. You can easily take me to her house to sing duets, as part of her lesson. I tell you I have not slept a wink all night for thinking of her, and unless I see her I shall never sleep again as long as I live. Ah!" he cried, putting his hands on Ercole's shoulders, "you do not know what it is to be in love! How everything one touches is fire, and the sky is like lead, and one minute you are cold and one minute you are hot, and you may turn and turn on your pillow all night and never sleep, and you want to curse everybody you see, or to embrace them, it makes no difference—anything to express the——"

"Devil! and may he carry you off!" interrupted Ercole, laughing. But his manner changed. "Poor fellow," he said presently, "it appears to me you are in love."

"It appears to you, does it? 'Appears'—a beautiful word, in faith. I can tell you it appears to me so, too. Ah! it 'appears' to

you—very good indeed!" And Nino waxed wroth.

"I will give you some advice, Ninetto mio. Do not fall in love with any one. It always ends badly."

"You come late with your counsel, Sor Ercole. In truth, a very good piece of advice when a man is fifty, and married, and wears a skull-cap. When I wear a skull-cap and take snuff I will follow your instructions." He walked up and down the room, grinding his teeth, and clapping his hands together. Ercole rose and stopped him.

"Let us talk seriously," he said.

"With all my heart; as seriously as you please."

"You have only seen this signorina once."

"Once!" cried Nino,—"as if once were not——"

"Diavolo; let me speak. You have only seen her once. She is noble, an heiress, a great lady—worse than all, a foreigner; as beautiful as a statue, if you please, but twice as cold. She has a father who knows the proprieties, a

piece of iron, I tell you, who would kill you just as he would drink a glass of wine, with the greatest indifference, if he suspected you lifted your eyes to his daughter."

"I do not believe your calumnies," said Nino, still hotly. "She is not cold, and if I can see her she will listen to me. I am sure of it."

"We will speak of that by and by. You—what are you? Nothing but a singer, who has not even appeared before the public, without a baiocco in the world or anything else but your voice. You are not even handsome."

"What difference does that make to a woman of heart?" retorted Nino, angrily. "Let me only speak to her——"

"A thousand devils!" exclaimed De Pretis, impatiently; "what good will you do by speaking to her? Are you Dante, or Petrarca, or a preacher—what are you? Do you think you can have a great lady's hand for the asking? Do you flatter yourself that you are so eloquent that nobody can withstand you?"

"Yes," said Nino, boldly. "If I could only speak to her——"

"Then, in heaven's name, go and speak to her. Get a new hat and a pair of lavender gloves, and walk about the Villa Borghese until you meet her, and then throw yourself on your knees and kiss her feet, and the dust from her shoes; and say you are dying for her, and will she be good enough to walk as far as Santa Maria del Popolo and be married to you! That is all; you see it is nothing you ask—a mere politeness on her part—oh, nothing, nothing." And De Pretis rubbed his hands and smiled, and seeing that Nino did not answer, he blew his nose with his great blue cotton handkerchief.

"You have no heart at all, maestro," said Nino at last. "Let us sing."

They worked hard at Bordogni for half an hour, and Nino did not open his mouth except to produce the notes. But as his blood was up from the preceding interview he took great pains, and Ercole, who makes him sing all the solfeggi he can from a sense of duty, himself wearied of the ridiculous old-fashioned runs and intervals.

"Bene," he said; "let us sing a piece now,

and then you will have done enough." He put an opera on the piano, and Nino lifted up his voice and sang, only too glad to give his heart passage to his lips. Ercole screwed up his eyes with a queer smile he has when he is pleased.

"Capperi!" he ejaculated, when Nino had done.

"What has happened?" asked the latter.

"I cannot tell you what has happened," said Ercole, "but I will tell you that you had better always sing like that, and you will be applauded. Why have you never sung that piece in that way before?"

"I do not know. Perhaps it is because I am unhappy."

"Very well, never dare to be happy again, if you mean to succeed. You can make a statue shed tears if you please." Ercole took a pinch of snuff, and turned round to look out of the window. Nino leaned on the piano, drumming with his fingers and looking at the back of the maestro's head. The first rays of the sun just fell into the room and gilded the red brick floor.

"Then instead of buying lavender kid gloves," said Nino at last, his face relaxing a little, "and going to the Villa Borghese, you advise me to borrow a guitar and sing to my statue? Is that it?"

"Che Diana! I did not say that!" said Ercole, still facing the window and finishing his pinch of snuff with a certain satisfaction. "But if you want the guitar, take it,—there it lies. I will not answer for what you do with it." His voice sounded kindly, for he was so much pleased. Then he made Nino sing again, a little love song of Tosti, who writes for the heart and sings so much better without a voice than all your stage tenors put together. And the maestro looked long at Nino when he had done, but he did not say anything. Nino put on his hat, gloomily enough, and prepared to go.

"I will take the guitar, if you will lend it to me," he said.

"Yes, if you like, and I will give you a handkerchief to wrap it up with," said De Pretis, absently, but he did not get up from his seat. He was watching Nino, and he seemed

to be thinking. Just as the boy was going with the instrument under his arm he called him back.

"Ebbene?" said Nino, with his hand on the lock of the door.

"I will make you a song to sing to your guitar," said Ercole.

"You?"

"Yes—but without music. Look here, Nino—sit down. What a hurry you are in. I was young myself, once upon a time."

"Once upon a time! Fairy stories—once upon a time there was a king, and so on." Nino was not to be easily pacified.

"Well, perhaps it is a fairy tale, but it is in the future. I have an idea."

"Oh, is that all? But it is perhaps the first time. I understand."

"Listen. Have you read Dante?"

"I know the *Vita Nuova* by heart, and some of the *Commedia*. But how the diavolo does Dante enter into this question?"

"And Silvio Pellico, and a little literature?" continued Ercole, not heeding the comment.

"Yes, after a fashion. And you? Do you know them?"

"Che c'entro io?" cried Ercole, impatiently; "what do I want to know such things for? But I have heard of them."

"I congratulate you," replied Nino, ironically.

"Have patience. You are no longer an artist. You are a professor of literature."

"I—a professor of literature? What nonsense are you talking?"

"You are a great stupid donkey, Nino. Supposing I obtain for you an engagement to read literature with the Contessina di Lira, will you not be a professor? If you prefer singing——" But Nino comprehended in a flash the whole scope of the proposal, and threw his arms round Ercole's neck and embraced him.

"What a mind! Oh, maestro mio, I will die for you! Command me, and I will do anything for you; I will run errands for you, black your boots, anything——" he cried in the ecstasy of delight that overmastered him.

"Piano, piano," objected the maestro, disengaging himself from his pupil's embrace. "It

is not done yet. There is much, much to think of first." Nino retreated, a little disconcerted at not finding his enthusiasm returned, but radiant still.

"Calm yourself," said Ercole, smiling. "If you do this thing you must act a part. You must manage to conceal your occupation entirely. You must look as solemn as an undertaker and be a real professor. They will ultimately find you out, and throw you out of the window, and dismiss me for recommending you. But that is nothing."

"No," said Nino, "that is of no importance." And he ran his fingers through his hair, and looked delighted.

"You shall know all about it this evening, or to-morrow——"

"This evening, Sor Ercole, this evening, or I shall die. Stay, let me go to the house with you, when you give your lesson, and wait for you at the door."

"Pumpkin-head! I will have nothing to do with you," said De Pretis.

"Ah, I will be as quiet as you please. I will be like a lamb, and wait until this evening."

"If you will really be quiet, I will do what you wish. Come to me this evening, about the Ave Maria—or a little earlier. Yes, come at twenty-three hours." In October that is about five o'clock, by French time.

"And I may take the guitar?" said Nino, as he rose to go.

"With all my heart. But do not spoil everything by singing to her, and betraying yourself."

So Nino thanked the maestro enthusiastically and went away, humming a tune, as he now and again struck the strings of the guitar that he carried under his arm, to be sure it was there.

Do not think that because De Pretis suddenly changed his mind, and even proposed to Nino a plan for making the acquaintance of the young countess, he is a man to veer about like a weathercock, nor yet a bad man, willing to help a boy to do mischief. That is not at all like Ercole de Pretis. He has since told me he was much astonished at the way Nino sang the love song at his lesson; and he was instantly convinced that in order to be a great artist Nino must be

in love always. Besides, the maestro is as liberal in his views of life as he is conservative in his ideas about government. Nino is everything the most strait-laced father could wish him to be, and as he was then within a few months of making his first appearance on the stage, De Pretis, who understands those things, could very well foresee the success he has had. Now De Pretis is essentially a man of the people, and I am not; therefore he saw no objection in the way of a match between a great singer and a noble damigella. But had I known what was going on, I would have stopped the whole affair at that point, for I am not so weak as Mariuccia seems to think. I do not mean that now everything is settled I would wish it undone. Heaven forbid! But I would have stopped it then, for it is a most incongruous thing, a peasant boy making love to a countess.

Nino, however, has one great fault, and that is his reticence. It is true, he never does anything he would not like me, or all the world, to know. But I would like to know, all the same. It is a habit I have fallen into, from having to watch

that old woman, for fear she should be too extravagant. All that time he never said anything, and I supposed he had forgotten all about the contessina, for I did not chance to see De Pretis; and when I did, he talked of nothing but Nino's *début* and the arrangements that were to be made. So that I knew nothing about it, though I was pleased to see him reading so much. He took a sudden fancy for literature, and read when he was not singing, and even made me borrow Ambrosoli, in several volumes, from a friend. He read every word of it, and talked very intelligently about it too. I never thought there was any reason.

But De Pretis thinks differently. He believes that a man may be the son of a ciociaro—a fellow who ties his legs up in rags and thongs, and lives on goats' milk in the mountains—and that if he has brains enough, or talent enough, he may marry any woman he likes without ever thinking whether she is noble or not. De Pretis must be old-fashioned, for I am sure I do not think in that way, and I know a hundred times as much as he—a hundred times.

I suppose it must have been the very day when Nino had been to De Pretis in the morning that he had instructions to go to the house of Count von Lira on the morrow; for I remember very well that Nino acted strangely in the evening, singing and making a noise for a few minutes, and then burying himself in a book. However that may be, it was very soon afterwards that he went to the Palazzo Carmandola, dressed in his best clothes, he tells me, in order to make a favourable impression on the count. The latter had spoken to De Pretis about the lessons in literature, to which he attached great importance, and the maestro had turned the idea to account for his pupil. But Nino did not expect to see the young contessa on this first day, or at least he did not hope he would be able to speak to her. And so it turned out.

The footman, who had a red waistcoat and opened the door with authority, as if ready to close it again on the smallest provocation, did not frighten Nino at all, though he eyed him suspiciously enough, and after ascertaining his business departed to announce him to the count.

Meanwhile Nino, who was very much excited at the idea of being under the same roof with the object of his adoration, set himself down on one of the carved chests that surrounded the hall. The green baize door at the other end swung noiselessly on its hinges, closing itself behind the servant, and the boy was left alone. He might well be frightened, if not at the imposing appearance of the footman, at least at the task he had undertaken. But a boy like Nino is afraid of nothing when he is in love, and he simply looked about him, realising that he was without doubt in the house of a gran' signor, and from time to time brushing a particle of dust from his clothes, or trying to smooth his curly black hair, which he had caused to be clipped a little for the occasion; a very needless expense, for he looks better with his hair long.

Before many moments the servant returned, and with some condescension said that the count awaited him. Nino would rather have faced the mayor, or the king himself, than Graf von Lira, though he was not at all frightened—he was only very much excited, and he strove to calm

himself, as he was ushered through the apartments to the small sitting-room, where he was expected.

Graf von Lira, as I have already told you, is a foreigner of rank, who had been a Prussian colonel, and was wounded in the war of 1866. He is very tall, very thin, and very gray, with wooden features and a huge moustache that stands out like the beaks on the colonna rostrata. His eyes are small and very far apart, and fix themselves with terrible severity when he speaks, even if he is only saying "good-morning." His nails are very long and most carefully kept, and though he is so lame that he could not move a step without the help of his stick, he is still an upright and military figure. I remember well how he looked, for he came to see me under peculiar circumstances, many months after the time of which I am now speaking; and, besides, I had stood next to him for an hour in the chapel of the choir in St. Peter's.

He speaks Italian intelligibly, but with the strangest German constructions, and he rolls the letter *r* curiously in his throat. But he is an

intelligent man for a soldier, though he thinks talent is a matter of education, and education a matter of drill. He is the most ceremonious man I ever saw; and Nino says he rose from his chair to meet him, and would not sit down again until Nino was seated.

"The signore is the professor of Italian literature recommended to me by Signor De Pretis?" inquired the colonel in iron tones, as he scrutinised Nino.

"Yes, Signor Conte," was the answer.

"You are a singularly young man to be a professor." Nino trembled. "And how have you the education obtained in order the obligations and not-to-be-avoided responsibilities of this worthy-of-all-honour career to meet?"

"I went to school here, Signor Conte, and the Professor Grandi, in whose house I always have lived, has taught me everything else I know."

"What do you know?" inquired the count, so suddenly that Nino was taken off his guard. He did not know what to answer. The count looked very stern and pulled his moustaches. "You have not here come," he continued, seeing that

Nino made no answer, "without knowing something. Evident is it, that, although a man young be, if he nothing knows, he cannot a professor be."

"You speak justly, Signor Conte," Nino answered at last, "and I do know some things. I know the *Commedia* of Alighieri, and Petrarca, and I have read the *Gerusalemme Liberata* with Professor Grandi, and I can repeat all of the *Vita Nuova* by heart, and some of the——"

"For the present that is enough," said the count. "If you nothing better to do have, will you so kind be as to begin?"

"Begin?" said Nino, not understanding.

"Yes, signore; it would unsuitable be if I my daughter to the hands of a man committed unacquainted with the matter he to teach her proposes. I desire to be satisfied that you all these things really know."

"Do I understand, Signor Conte, that you wish me to repeat to you some of the things I know by heart?"

"You have me understood," said the count,

severely. "I have all the books bought of which you speak. You will repeat, and I will in the book follow. Then shall we know each other much better."

Nino was not a little astonished at this mode of procedure, and wondered how far his memory would serve him in such an unexpected examination.

"It will take a long time to ascertain in this way——" he began.

"This," said the count coldly, as he opened a volume of Dante, "is the celestial play by Signor Alighieri. If you anything know, you will it repeat."

Nino resigned himself and began repeating the first canto of the "Inferno." When he had finished it he paused.

"Forwards," said the count, without any change of manner.

"More?" inquired Nino.

"March!" said the old gentleman in military tone, and the boy went on with the second canto.

"Apparently know you the beginning." The

count opened the book at random in another place. "The thirtieth canto of 'Purgatory.' You will now it repeat."

"Ah!" cried Nino, "that is where Dante meets Beatrice."

"My hitherto not-by-any-means-extensive, but always from-the-conscience-undertaken reading, reaches not so far. You will it repeat. So shall we know." Nino passed his hand inside his collar as though to free his throat, and began again, losing all consciousness of his tormentor in his own enjoyment of the verse.

"When was the Signor Alighieri born?" inquired Graf von Lira, very suddenly, as though to catch him.

"May, 1265, in Florence," answered the other, as quickly.

"I said when, not where. I know he was in Florence born. When *and* where died he?" The question was asked fiercely.

"Fourteenth of September 1321, at Ravenna."

"I think really you something of Signor Alighieri know," said the count, and shut up the volume of the poet and the dictionary of dates he

had been obliged to consult to verify Nino's answers. "We will proceed."

Nino is fortunately one of those people whose faculties serve them best at their utmost need, and during the three hours—three blessed hours—that Graf von Lira kept him under his eye, asking questions and forcing him to repeat all manner of things, he acquitted himself fairly well.

"I have now myself satisfied that you something know," said the count, in his snappish military fashion, and he shut the last book, and never from that day referred in any manner to Nino's extent of knowledge, taking it for granted that he had made an exhaustive investigation. "And now," he continued, "I desire you to engage for the reading of literature with my daughter, upon the usual terms." Nino was so much pleased that he almost lost his self-control, but a moment restored his reflection.

"I am honoured"——he began.

"You are not honoured at all," interrupted the count, coldly. "What are the usual terms?"

"Three or four francs a lesson," suggested Nino.

"Three or four francs are not the usual terms. I have inquiries made. Five francs are the usual terms. Three times in the week, at eleven. You will on the morrow begin. Allow me to offer you some cigars." And he ended the interview.

CHAPTER IV.

In a sunny room overlooking the great courtyard of the Palazzo Carmandola, Nino sat down to give Hedwig von Lira her first lesson in Italian literature. He had not the remotest idea what the lesson would be like, for in spite of the tolerably wide acquaintance with the subject which he owed to my care and my efforts to make a scholar of him, he knew nothing about teaching. Nevertheless, as his pupil spoke the language fluently, though with the occasional use of words of low origin, like all foreigners who have grown up in Rome and have learned to speak from their servants, he anticipated little difficulty. He felt quite sure of being able to interpret the hard places, and he had learned from me to know the best and finest passages in a number of authors.

But imagine the feelings of a boy of twenty,

perfectly in love, without having the smallest right to be, suddenly placed by the side of the object of his adoration, and told to teach her all he knows—with her father in the next room and the door open between! I have always thought it was a proof of Nino's determined character, that he should have got over this first lesson without accident.

Hedwig von Lira, the contessina, as we always call her, is just Nino's age, but she seemed much younger, as the children of the North always do. I have told you what she was like to look at, and you will not wonder that I called her a statue. She looked as cold as a statue, just as I said, and so I should hardly describe her as beautiful. But then I am not a sculptor, nor do I know anything about those arts, though I can tell a good work when I see it. I do not wish to appear prejudiced, and so I will not say anything more about it. I like life in living things, and sculptors may, if it please them, adore straight noses, and level brows, and mouths that no one could possibly eat with. I do not care in the least, and if you say that I once thought dif-

clashing of the bells. The contessina looked up suddenly and met his eyes, but it was the boy that blushed.

"Would you mind finishing the canto?" she asked. "There are only ten lines more——" Mind! Nino flushed with pleasure.

"Anzi—by all means," he cried. "My time is yours, signorina."

When they had done, he rose, and his face was sad and pale again. He hated to go, but he was only a teacher, and at his first lesson, too. She also rose, and waited for him to leave the room. He could not hold his tongue.

"Signorina——" he stammered, and checked himself. She looked at him, to listen, but his heart smote him when he had thus arrested her attention What could he say, as he stood bowing? It was sufficiently stupid, what he said.

"I shall have the honour of returning to-morrow—the day after to-morrow, I would say."

"Yes," said she, "I believe that is the arrangement. Good-morning, Signor Professore." The title of professor rang strangely in his ear. Was there the slightest tinge of irony in her voice?

Was she laughing at his boyish looks? Ugh! the thought tingled. He bowed himself out.

That was the first lesson, and the second was like it, I suppose, and a great many others about which I knew nothing, for I was always occupied in the middle of the day, and did not ask where he went. It seemed to me that he was becoming a great dandy, but as he never asked me for any money from the day he learned to copy music, I never put any questions. He certainly had a new coat before Christmas, and gloves, and very nice boots, that made me smile when I thought of the day when he arrived, with only one shoe —and it had a hole in it as big as half his foot. But now he grew to be so careful of his appearance that Mariuccia began to call him the "signorino." De Pretis said he was making great progress, and so I was contented, though I always thought it was a sacrifice for him to be a singer.

Of course, as he went three times a week to the Palazzo Carmandola, he began to be used to the society of the contessina. I never understood how he succeeded in keeping up the comedy of

being a professor. A real Roman would have discovered him in a week. But foreigners are different. If they are satisfied they pay their money and ask no questions. Besides, he studied all the time, saying that if he ever lost his voice he would turn man of letters; which sounded so prudent that I had nothing to say. Once, we were walking in the Corso, and the contessina with her father passed in the carriage. Nino raised his hat, but they did not see him, for there is always a crowd in the Corso.

"Tell me," he cried, excitedly, as they went by, "is it not true that she is beautiful?"

"A piece of marble, my son," said I, suspecting nothing; and I turned into a tobacconist's to buy a cigar.

One day—Nino says it was in November—the contessina began asking him questions about the Pantheon. It was in the middle of the lesson, and he wondered at her stopping to talk. But you may imagine whether he was glad or not to have an opportunity of speaking about something besides Dante.

"Yes, signorina," he answered, "Professor

Grandi says it was built for public baths; but, of course, we all think it was a temple."

"Were you ever there at night?" asked she, indifferently, and the sun through the window so played with her golden hair that Nino wondered how she could ever think of night at all.

"At night, signorina? No indeed! What should I go there at night to do, in the dark! I was never there at night."

"I will go there at night," she said, briefly.

"Ah—you would have it lit up with torches, as they do the Coliseum?"

"No. Is there no moon in Italy, professore?"

"The moon, there is. But there is such a little hole in the top of the Rotonda"—that is our Roman name for the Pantheon—"that it would be very dark."

"Precisely," said she. "I will go there at night, and see the moon shining through the hole in the dome."

"Eh," cried Nino, laughing, "you will see the moon better outside in the piazza. Why should you go inside, where you can see so little of it?"

"I will go," replied the contessina. "The

Italians have no sense of the beautiful—the mysterious." Her eyes grew dreamy as she tried to call up the picture she had never seen.

"Perhaps," said Nino, humbly. "But," he added, suddenly brightening at the thought, "it is very easy, if you would like to go. I will arrange it. Will you allow me?"

"Yes, arrange it. Let us go on with our lesson."

I would like to tell you all about it; how Nino saw the sacristan of the Pantheon that evening, and ascertained from his little almanac—which has all kinds of wonderful astrological predictions, as well as the calendar—when it would be full moon. And perhaps what Nino said to the sacristan, and what the sacristan said to Nino might be amusing. I am very fond of these little things, and fond of talking too. For since it is talking that distinguishes us from other animals, I do not see why I should not make the most of it. But you who are listening to me have seen very little of the Contessina Hedwig as yet, and unless I quickly tell you more, you will wonder how all the curious things that happened to her could possibly have grown out of the attempt of

a little singer like Nino to make her acquaintance. Well, Nino is a great singer now, of course, but he was little once; and when he palmed himself off on the old count for an Italian master without my knowledge, nobody had ever heard of him at all.

Therefore since I must satisfy your curiosity before anything else, and not dwell too long on the details—the dear, commonplace details—I will simply say that Nino succeeded without difficulty in arranging with the sacristan of the Pantheon to allow a party of foreigners to visit the building at the full moon, at midnight. I have no doubt he even expended a franc with the little man, who is very old and dirty, and keeps chickens in the vestibule—but no details!

On the appointed night Nino, wrapped in that old cloak of mine (which is very warm, though it is threadbare), accompanied the party to the temple, or church, or whatever you like to call it. The party were simply the count and his daughter, an Austrian gentleman of their acquaintance, and the dear baroness—that sympathetic woman who broke so many hearts and cared not at all for the

chatter of the people. Every one has seen her, with her slim, graceful ways, and her face that was like a mulatto peach for darkness and fineness, and her dark eyes and tiger-lily look. They say she lived entirely on sweetmeats and coffee, and it is no wonder she was so sweet and so dark. She called me "count"—which is very foolish now, but if I were going to fall in love, I would have loved her. I would not love a statue. As for the Austrian gentleman, it is not of any importance to describe him.

These four people Nino conducted to the little entrance at the back of the Pantheon, and the sacristan struck a light to show them the way to the door of the church. Then he put out his taper, and let them do as they pleased.

Conceive if you can the darkness of Egypt, the darkness that can be felt, impaled and stabbed through its whole thickness by one mighty moonbeam, clear and clean and cold, from the top to the bottom. All around, in the circle of the outer black, lie the great dead in their tombs, whispering to each other of deeds that shook the world; whispering in a language all their own as

yet—the language of the life to come—the language of a stillness so dread and deep that the very silence clashes against it, and makes dull, muffled beatings in ears that strain to catch the dead men's talk: the shadow of immortality falling through the shadow of death, and bursting back upon its heavenward course from the depth of the abyss; climbing again upon its silver self to the sky above, leaving behind the horror of the deep.

So in that lonely place at midnight falls the moon upon the floor, and through the mystic shaft of rays ascend and descend the souls of the dead. Hedwig stood out alone upon the white circle on the pavement beneath the dome, and looked up as though she could see the angels coming and going. And, as she looked, the heavy lace veil that covered her head fell back softly, as though a spirit wooed her and would fain look on something fairer than he, and purer. The whiteness clung to her face, and each separate wave of hair was like spun silver. And she looked steadfastly up. For a moment she stood, and the hushed air trembled about her.

Then the silence caught the tremor, and quivered, and a thrill of sound hovered and spread its wings, and sailed forth from the night.

"Spirto gentil dei sogni miei——"

Ah, Signorina Edvigia, you know that voice now, but you did not know it then. How your heart stopped, and beat, and stopped again, when you first heard that man sing out his whole heartful—you in the light and he in the dark! And his soul shot out to you upon the sounds, and died fitfully, as the magic notes dashed their soft wings against the vaulted roof above you, and took new life again and throbbed heavenward in broad, passionate waves, till your breath came thick and your blood ran fiercely—ay, even your cold northern blood—in very triumph that a voice could so move you. A voice in the dark. For a full minute after it ceased you stood there, and the others, wherever they might be in the shadow, scarcely breathed.

That was how Hedwig first heard Nino sing. When at last she recovered herself enough to ask aloud the name of the singer, Nino had moved quite close to her.

"It is a relation of mine, signorina, a young fellow who is going to be an artist. I asked him as a favour to come here and sing to you to-night. I thought it might please you."

"A relation of yours!" exclaimed the contessina. And the others approached so that they all made a group in the disc of moonlight. "Just think, my dear baroness, this wonderful voice is a relation of Signor Cardegna, my excellent Italian master!" There was a little murmur of admiration; then the old count spoke.

"Signore," said he, rolling in his gutturals, "it is my duty to very much thank you. You will now, if you please, me the honour do, me to your all-the-talents-possible-possessing relation to present." Nino had foreseen the contingency and disappeared into the dark. Presently he returned.

"I am so sorry, Signor Conte," he said. "The sacristan tells me that when my cousin had finished he hurried away, saying he was afraid of taking some ill if he remained here where it is so damp. I will tell him how much you appreciated him."

"Curious is it," remarked the count. "I heard him not going off."

"He stood in the doorway of the sacristy, by the high altar, Signor Conte."

"In that case is it different."

"I am sorry," said Nino. "The signorina was so unkind as to say, lately, that we Italians have no sense of the beautiful, the mysterious——"

"I take it back," said Hedwig, gravely, still standing in the moonlight. "Your cousin has a very great power over the beautiful."

"And the mysterious," added the baroness, who had not spoken, "for his departure without showing himself has left me the impression of a sweet dream. Give me your arm, Professore Cardegna. I will not stay here any longer, now that the dream is over." Nino sprang to her side politely, though, to tell the truth, she did not attract him at first sight. He freed one arm from the old cloak, and reflected that she could not tell in the dark how very shabby it was.

"You give lessons to the Signora von Lira?" she asked, leading him quickly away from the party.

"Yes—in Italian literature, signora."

"Ah—she tells me great things of you. Could you not spare me an hour or two in the week, professore?"

Here was a new complication. Nino had certainly not contemplated setting up for an Italian teacher to all the world when he undertook to give lessons to Hedwig.

"Signora——" he began, in a protesting voice.

"You will do it to oblige me, I am sure," she said, eagerly, and her slight hand just pressed upon his arm a little. Nino had found time to reflect that this lady was intimate with Hedwig, and that he might possibly gain an opportunity of seeing the girl he loved if he accepted the offer.

"Whenever it pleases you, signora," he said, at length.

"Can you come to me to-morrow at eleven?" she asked.

"At twelve, if you please, signora, or half past. Eleven is the contessina's hour to-morrow."

"At half past twelve, then, to-morrow," said she, and she gave him her address, as they went

out into the street. "Stop," she added," where do you live?"

"Number twenty-seven, Santa Catarina dei Funari," he answered, wondering why she asked. The rest of the party came out, and Nino bowed to the ground, as he bid the contessina good-night.

He was glad to be free of that pressure on his arm, and he was glad to be alone, to wander through the streets under the moonlight, and to think over what he had done.

"There is no risk of my being discovered," he said to himself, confidently. "The story of the near relation was well imagined, and besides, it is true. Am I not my own nearest relation? I certainly have no others that I know of. And this baroness—what can she want of me? She speaks Italian like a Spanish cow, and indeed she needs a professor badly enough. But why should she take a fancy for me as a teacher. Ah! those eyes! Not the baroness'. Edvigia—Edvigia de Lira—Edvigia Ca—Cardegna! Why not?" He stopped to think, and looked long at the moonbeams playing on the waters of the fountain.

"Why not? But the baroness—may the diavolo fly away with her! What should I do—I indeed! with a pack of baronesses? I will go to bed and dream—not of a baroness! Macchè, never a baroness in my dreams, with eyes like a snake and who cannot speak three words properly in the only language under the sun worth speaking! Not I—I will dream of Edvigia di Lira—she is the spirit of my dreams. Spirto gentil ——" and away he went, humming the air from the Favorita in the top of his head, as is his wont.

The next day the contessina could talk of nothing during her lesson but the unknown singer who had made the night so beautiful for her, and Nino flushed red under his dark skin and ran his fingers wildly through his curly hair, with pleasure. But he set his square jaw, that means so much, and explained to his pupil how hard it would be for her to hear him again. For his friend, he said, was soon to make his appearance on the stage, and of course he could not be heard singing before that. And as the young lady insisted, Nino grew silent, and remarked that the lesson was not progressing.

Thereupon Hedwig blushed—the first time he had ever seen her blush—and did not approach the subject again.

After that he went to the house of the baroness, where he was evidently expected, for the servant asked his name and immediately ushered him into her presence. She was one of those lithe, dark women of good race, that are to be met with all over the world, and she has broken many a heart. But she was not like a snake at all, as Nino had thought at first. She was simply a very fine lady who did exactly what she pleased, and if she did not always act rightly, yet I think she rarely acted unkindly. After all, the buon Dio has not made us all paragons of domestic virtue. Men break their hearts for so very little, and, unless they are ruined, they melt the pieces at the next flame and join them together again like bits of sealing wax.

The baroness sat before a piano in a boudoir, where there was not very much light. Every part of the room was crowded with fans, ferns, palms, Oriental carpets and cushions, books,

porcelain, majolica, and pictures. You could hardly move without touching some ornament, and the heavy curtains softened the sunshine, and a small open fire of wood helped the warmth. There was also an odour of Russian tobacco. The baroness smiled and turned on the piano seat.

"Ah, professore! You come just in time," said she. "I am trying to sing such a pretty song to myself, and I cannot pronounce the words. Come and teach me." Nino contrasted the whole air of this luxurious retreat with the prim, soldierly order that reigned in the count's establishment.

"Indeed, signora, I come to teach you whatever I can. Here I am. I cannot sing, but I will stand beside you and prompt the words."

Nino is not a shy boy at all, and he assumed the duties required of him immediately. He stood by her side, and she just nodded and began to sing a little song that stood on the desk of the piano. She did not sing out of tune, but she made wrong notes and pronounced horribly.

"Pronounce the words for me," she repeated every now and then.

"But pronouncing in singing is different from speaking," he objected at last, and fairly forgetting himself and losing patience, he began softly to sing the words over. Little by little, as the song pleased him, he lost all memory of where he was, and stood beside her singing just as he would have done to De Pretis, from the sheet, with all the accuracy and skill that were in him. At the end, he suddenly remembered how foolish he was. But, after all, he had not sung to the power of his voice, and she might not recognise in him the singer of last night. The baroness looked up with a light laugh.

"I have found you out," she cried, clapping her hands. "I have found you out!"

"What, signora?"

"You are the tenor of the Pantheon—that is all. I knew it. Are you so sorry that I have found you out?" she asked, for Nino turned very white, and his eyes flashed at the thought of the folly he had committed.

CHAPTER V.

NINO was thoroughly frightened, for he knew that discovery portended the loss of everything most dear to him. No more lessons with Hedwig, no more parties to the Pantheon, no more peace, no more anything. He wrung his fingers together and breathed hard.

"Ah, signora!" he found voice to exclaim, "I am sure you cannot believe it possible——"

"Why not, Signor Cardegna?" asked the baroness, looking up at him from under her half-closed lids with a mocking glance. "Why not? Did you not tell me where you lived? And does not the whole neighbourhood know that you are no other than Giovanni Cardegna, commonly called Nino, who is to make his *début* in the Carnival season?"

"Dio mio!" ejaculated Nino in a hoarse voice,

realising that he was entirely found out, and that nothing could save him. He paced the room in an agony of despair, and his square face was as white as a sheet. The baroness sat watching him with a smile on her lips, amused at the tempest she had created, and pretending to know much more than she did. She thought it not impossible that Nino, who was certainly poor, might be supporting himself by teaching Italian while studying for the stage, and she inwardly admired his sense and twofold talent if that were really the case. But she was willing to torment him a little, seeing that she had the power.

"Signor Cardegna"—she called him in her soft voice. He turned quickly, and stood facing her, his arms crossed.

"You look like Napoleon at Waterloo, when you stand like that," she laughed. He made no answer, waiting to see what she would do with her victory. "It seems that you are sorry I have discovered you," she added, presently, looking down at her hands.

"Is that all!" he said, with a bitter sneer on his pale young face.

"Then, since you are sorry, you must have a reason for concealment," she went on, as though reflecting on the situation. It was deftly done, and Nino took heart.

"Signora," he said, in a trembling voice, "it is natural that a man should wish to live. I give lessons now, until I have appeared in public, to support myself."

"Ah, I begin to understand," said the baroness. In reality she began to doubt, reflecting that if this were the whole truth Nino would be too proud—or any other Italian—to say it so plainly. She was subtle, the baroness!

"And do you suppose," he continued, "that if once the Conte di Lira had an idea that I was to be a public singer he would employ me as a teacher for his daughter?"

"No, but others might," she objected.

"But not the count——" Nino bit his lip, fearing he had betrayed himself.

"Nor the contessina," laughed the baroness, completing the sentence. He saw at a glance what she suspected, and instead of keeping cool grew angry.

"I came here, Signora Baronessa, not to be cross-examined, but to teach you Italian. Since you do not desire to study, I will say good-morning." He took his hat and moved proudly to the door.

"Come here," she said, not raising her voice, but still commanding. He turned, hesitated, and came back. He thought her voice was changed. She rose and swept her silken morning-gown between the chairs and tables till she reached a deep divan on the other side of the room. There she sat down.

"Come and sit beside me," she said, kindly, and he obeyed in silence.

"Do you know what would have happened," she continued, when he was seated, "if you had left me just now? I would have gone to the Graf von Lira and told him that you were not a fit person to teach his daughter; that you are a singer, and not a professor at all; and that you have assumed this disguise for the sake of seeing his daughter." But I do not believe that she would have done it.

"That would have been a betrayal," said Nino,

fiercely, looking away from her. She laughed lightly.

"Is it not natural," she asked, "that I should make inquiries about my Italian teacher before I begin lessons with him? And if I find he is not what he pretends to be should I not warn my intimate friends?" She spoke so reasonably that he was fain to acknowledge that she was right.

"It is just," he said, sullenly. "But you have been very quick to make your inquiries, as you call them."

"The time was short, since you were to come this morning."

"That is true," he answered. He moved uneasily. "And now, signora, will you be kind enough to tell me what you intend to do with me?"

"Certainly, since you are more reasonable. You see I treat you altogether as an artist, and not at all as an Italian master. A great artist may idle away a morning in a woman's boudoir; a simple teacher of languages must be more industrious."

"But I am not a great artist," said Nino, whose vanity—we all have it—began to flutter a little.

"You will be one before long, and one of the greatest. You are a boy yet, my little tenor," said she, looking at him with her dark eyes, "and I might almost be your mother. How old are you, Signor Nino?"

"I was twenty on my last birthday," he answered, blushing.

"You see! I am thirty—at least," she added, with a short laugh.

"Well, signora, what of that?" asked Nino, half amused. "I wish I were thirty myself."

"I am glad you are not," said she. "Now listen. You are completely in my power, do you understand? Yes. And you are apparently very much in love with my young friend, the Contessina di Lira——" Nino sprang to his feet, his face white again, but with rage this time.

"Signora," he cried, "this is too much! It is insufferable! Good-morning," and he made as though he would go.

"Very well," said the baroness; "then I will

go to the Graf and explain who you are. Ah—you are calm again in a moment? Sit down. Now I have discovered you, and I have a right to you, do you see? It is fortunate for you that I like you."

"You! You like me? In truth, you act as though you did! Besides, you are a stranger, Signora Baronessa, and a great lady. I never saw you till yesterday." But he resumed his seat.

"Good," said she. "Is not the Signorina Edvigia a great lady, and was there never a day when she was a stranger too?"

"I do not understand your caprices, signora. In fine, what do you want of me?"

"It is not necessary that you should understand me," answered the dark-eyed baroness. "Do you think I would hurt you—or rather your voice?"

"I do not know."

"You know very well that I would not; and as for my caprices, as you call them, do you think it is a caprice to love music? No, of course not. And who loves music loves musicians; at least," she added, with a most

enchanting smile, "enough to wish to have them near one. That is all. I want you to come here often and sing to me. Will you come and sing to me, my little tenor?"

Nino would not have been human had he not felt the flattery through the sting. And I always say that singers are the vainest kind of people.

"It is very like singing in a cage," he said, in protest. Nevertheless, he knew he must submit; for, however narrow his experience might be, this woman's smile and winning grace, even when she said the hardest things, told him that she would have her own way. He had the sense to understand, too, that whatever her plans might be, their object was to bring him near to herself, a reflection which was extremely soothing to his vanity.

"If you will come and sing to me,—only to me, of course, for I would not ask you to compromise your *début*,—but if you will come and sing to me, we shall be very good friends. Does it seem to you such a terrible penance to sing to me in my solitude?"

"It is never a penance to sing," said Nino,

simply. A shade of annoyance crossed the baroness' face.

"Provided," she said, "it entails nothing. Well, we will not talk about the terms."

They say women sometimes fall in love with a voice: *vox et præterea nihil*, as the poet has it. I do not know whether that is what happened to the baroness at first, but it has always seemed strange to me that she should have given herself so much trouble to secure Nino, unless she had a very strong fancy for him. I, for my part, think that when a lady of her condition takes such a sudden caprice into her head, she thinks it necessary to maltreat the poor man a little at first, just to satisfy her conscience, and to be able to say later that she did not encourage him. I have had some experience, as everybody is aware, and so I may speak boldly. On the other hand, a man like Nino, when he is in love, is absolutely blind to other women. There is only one idea in his soul that has any life, and every one outside that idea is only so much landscape; they are no better for him—the other women—than a museum of wax dolls.

The baroness, as you have seen, had Nino in her power, and there was nothing for it but submission; he came and went at her bidding, and often she would send for him when he least expected it. He would do as she commanded, somewhat sullenly and with a bad grace, but obediently, for all that; she had his destiny in her hands, and could in a moment frustrate all his hopes. But, of course, she knew that if she betrayed him to the count, Nino would be lost to her also, since he came to her only in order to maintain his relations with Hedwig.

Meanwhile the blue-eyed maiden of the North waxed fitful. Sometimes two or three lessons would pass in severe study. Nino, who always took care to know the passages they were reading, so that he might look at her instead of at his book, had instituted an arrangement by which they sat opposite each other at a small table. He would watch her every movement and look, and carry away a series of photographs of her,—a whole row, like the little books of Roman views they sell in the streets, strung together on a strip of paper,—and these views

of her lasted with him for two whole days, until he saw her again. But sometimes he would catch a glimpse of her in the interval driving with her father.

There were other days when Hedwig could not be induced to study, but would overwhelm Nino with questions about his wonderful cousin who sang, so that he longed with his whole soul to tell her it was he himself who had sung. She saw his reluctance to speak about it, and she blushed when she mentioned the night at the Pantheon; but for her life she could not help talking of the pleasure she had had. Her blushes seemed like the promise of spring roses to her lover, who drank of the air of her presence till that subtle ether ran like fire through his veins. He was nothing to her, he could see; but the singer of the Pantheon engrossed her thoughts and brought the hot blood to her cheek. The beam of moonlight had pierced the soft virgin darkness of her sleeping soul, and found a heart so cold and spotless that even a moon ray was warm by comparison. And the voice that sang "Spirto gentil dei sogni miei" had itself

become by memory the gentle spirit of her own dreams. She is so full of imagination, this statue of Nino's, that she heard the notes echoing after her by day and night, till she thought she must go mad unless she could hear the reality again. As the great solemn statue of Egyptian Memnon murmurs sweet, soft sounds to its mighty self at sunrise, a musical whisper in the desert, so the pure white marble of Nino's living statue vibrated with strange harmonies all the day long.

One night, as Nino walked homeward with De Pretis, who had come to supper with us, he induced the maestro to go out of his way at least half a mile, to pass the Palazzo Carmandola. It was a still night, not over-cold for December, and there were neither stars nor moon. As they passed the great house Nino saw a light in Hedwig's sitting-room—the room where he gave her the lessons. It was late, and she must be alone. On a sudden he stopped.

"What is the matter?" asked De Pretis.

For all answer, Nino, standing in the dark street below, lifted up his voice and sang the

first notes of the air he always associated with his beautiful contessina. Before he had sung a dozen bars the window opened, and the girl's figure could be seen, black against the light within. He went on for a few notes, and then ceased suddenly.

"Let us go," he said in a low voice to Ercole; and they went away, leaving the contessina listening in the stillness to the echo of their feet. A Roman girl would not have done that; she would have sat quietly inside, and never have shown herself. But foreigners are so impulsive!

Nino never heard the last of those few notes, any more than the contessina, literally speaking, ever heard the end of the song.

"Your cousin, about whom you make so much mystery, passed under my window last night," said the young lady the next day, with the usual display of carnation in her cheeks at the mention of him.

"Indeed, signorina?" said Nino, calmly, for he expected the remark. "And since you have never seen him, pray how did you know it was he?"

"How should one know?" she asked, scornfully. "There are not two such voices as his in Italy. He sang."

"He sang?" cried Nino, with an affectation of alarm. "I must tell the maestro not to let him sing in the open air; he will lose his voice."

"Who is his master?" asked Hedwig, suddenly.

"I cannot remember the name just now," said Nino, looking away. "But I will find out, if you wish." He was afraid of putting De Pretis to any inconvenience by saying that the young singer was his pupil. "However," he continued, "you will hear him sing as often as you please, after he makes his *début* next month." He sighed when he thought that it would all so soon be over. For how could he disguise himself any longer, when he should be singing in public every night? But Hedwig clapped her hands.

"So soon?" she cried. "Then there will be an end of the mystery."

"Yes," said Nino, gravely, "there will be an end of the mystery."

"At least you can tell me his name, now that we shall all know it?"

"Oh, his name—his name is Cardegna, like mine. He is my cousin, you know." And they went on with the lesson. But something of the kind occurred almost every time he came, so that he felt quite sure that, however indifferent he might be in her eyes, the singer, the Nino of whom she knew nothing, interested her deeply.

Meanwhile he was obliged to go very often to the baroness' scented boudoir, which smelled of incense and other Eastern perfumes, whenever it did not smell of cigarettes; and there he sang little songs, and submitted patiently to her demands for more and more music. She would sit by the piano and watch him as he sang, wondering whether he were handsome or ugly, with his square face and broad throat and the black circles round his eyes. He had a fascination for her, as being something utterly new to her.

One day she stood and looked over the music as he sang, almost touching him, and his hair was so curly and soft to look at that she was seized with a desire to stroke it, as Mariuccia strokes the old gray cat for hours together. The action

was quite involuntary, and her fingers rested only a moment on his head.

"It is so curly," she said, half playfully, half apologetically. But Nino started as though he had been stung, and his dark face grew pale. A girl could not have seemed more hurt at a strange man's touch.

"Signora!" he cried, springing to his feet. The baroness, who is as dark as he, blushed almost red, partly because she was angry, and partly because she was ashamed.

"What a boy you are!" she said, carelessly enough, and turned away to the window, pushing back one heavy curtain with her delicate hand, as if she would look out.

"Pardon me, signora, I am not a boy," said Nino, speaking to the back of her head as he stood behind her. "It is time we understood each other better. I love like a man and I hate like a man. I love some one very much."

"Fortunate contessina!" laughed the baroness, mockingly, without turning round.

"It does not concern you, signora, to know whom I love, nor, if you know, to speak of her.

I ask you a simple question. If you loved a man with your whole soul and heart, would you allow another man to stand beside you and stroke your hair, and say it was curly?" The baroness burst out laughing. "Do not laugh," he continued. "Remember that I am in your power only so long as it pleases me to submit to you. Do not abuse your advantage, or I will be capable of creating for myself situations quite as satisfactory as that of Italian master to the Signorina di Lira."

"What do you mean?" she asked, turning suddenly upon him. "I suppose you would tell me that you will make advantages for yourself which you will abuse against me? What do you mean?"

"I do not mean that. I mean only that I may not wish to give lessons to the contessina much longer." By this time the baroness had recovered her equanimity; and as she would have been sorry to lose Nino, who was a source of infinite pleasure and amusement to her, she decided to pacify him instead of teasing him any more.

"Is it not very foolish for us to quarrel about your curly hair?" said she. "We have been such good friends always." It might have been three weeks, her "always."

"I think it is," answered Nino, gravely. "But do not stroke my hair again, Signora Baronessa, or I shall be angry." He was quite serious, if you believe it, though he was only twenty. He forthwith sat down to the piano again and sang on. The baroness sat very silent and scarcely looked at him; but she held her hands clasped on her knee, and seemed to be thinking. After a time Nino stopped singing and sat silent also, absently turning over the sheets of music. It was warm in the room, and the sounds from the street were muffled and far away.

"Signor Nino," said the lady at last, in a different voice, "I am married."

"Yes, signora," he replied, wondering what would come next.

"It would be very foolish of me to care for you."

"It would also be very wicked," he said, calmly; for he is well grounded in religion. The baroness

stared at him in some surprise, but seeing he was perfectly serious, she went on.

"Precisely, as you say, very wicked. That being the case, I have decided not to care for you any more—I mean, not to care for you at all. I have made up my mind to be your friend."

"I am much obliged to your ladyship," he answered, without moving a muscle. For you see, he did not believe her.

"Now tell me, then, Signor Nino, are you in earnest in what you are doing? Do you really set your heart on doing this thing?"

"What?" asked Nino, annoyed at the persistence of the woman.

"Why need you be afraid to understand me? Can you not forgive me? Can you not believe in me that I will be your friend? I have always dreamed of being the friend of a great artist. Let me be yours, and believe me, the thing you have in your heart shall be done."

"I would like to hope so," he said. But he smiled incredulously. "I can only say that if you can accomplish what it is in my heart to do, I will go through fire and water at your bidding;

astonished at the conduct of the baroness, after a three weeks' acquaintance, or not, I care not a fig. It is just the way it happened, and I dare say she was really madly in love with Nino. If I had been Nino I should have been in love with her. But I would like you to admire my boy's audacity, and to review the situation, before I go on to speak of that important event in his life, his first appearance on the boards of the opera. At the time of his *début* he was still disguised as a teacher of Italian to the young contessina. She thought him interesting and intelligent, but that was all. Her thoughts were entirely, though secretly, engrossed by the mysterious singer whom she had heard twice but had not seen as far as she knew. Nino, on the other hand, loved her to desperation, and would have acted like a madman had he been deprived of his privilege of speaking to her three times a week. He loved her with the same earnest determination to win her that he had shown for years in the study of his art, and with all the rest of his nature besides, which is saying much—not to mention his soul, of which he thinks a great deal more than I do.

Besides this, the baroness had apparently fallen in love with him, had made him her intimate, and flattered him in a way to turn his head. Then she seemed to have thought better of her passion, and had promised him her friendship,—a promise which he himself considered of no importance whatever. As for the old Conte di Lira, he read the German newspapers, and cared for none of these things. De Pretis took an extra pinch of his good snuff, when he thought that his liberal ideas might yet be realised, and a man from the people marry a great lady by fairly winning her. Do not, after this, complain that I have left you in the dark, or that you do not know how it happened. It is as clear as water, and it was about four months from the time Nino saw Hedwig in St. Peter's to the time when he first sang in public.

Christmas passed by,—thank Heaven the municipality has driven away those most detestable pifferari who played on their discordant bagpipes at every corner for a fortnight, and nearly drove me crazy,—and the Befana, as we call the Epiphany in Rome, was gone, with its

gay racket, and the night fair in the Piazza Navona, and the days for Nino's first appearance drew near. I never knew anything about the business arrangements for the *début*, since De Pretis settled all that with Jacovacci, the impresario; but I know that there were many rehearsals, and that I was obliged to stand security to the theatrical tailor, together with De Pretis, in order that Nino might have his dress made. As for the cowl in the last act, De Pretis has a brother who is a monk, and between them they put together a very decent friar's costume; and Mariuccia had a good piece of rope which Nino used for a girdle.

"What does it matter?" he said, with much good sense. "For if I sing well, they will not look at my monk's hood; and if I sing badly, I may be dressed like the Holy Father and they will hiss me just the same. But in the beginning I must look like a courtier, and be dressed like one."

"I suppose so," said I; "but I wish you had taken to philosophy."

CHAPTER VI.

I SHALL never forget the day of Nino's first appearance. You may imagine whether we were in a state of excitement or not, after all these years of study and waiting. There was much more trouble and worry than if he had written a great book, and was just to publish it, and receive the homage of all the learning and talent in Europe; which is the kind of *début* I had hoped he would make in life, instead of putting on a foolish dress, and stamping about on a stage, and squalling love songs to a packed house, making pantomime with his hands, and altogether behaving like an idiot,—a crowd of people ready to hiss him at the slightest indication of weakness, or to carry him on their shoulders if they fancied his voice to their taste.

No wonder Nino was sad and depressed all day, and when he tried his voice in the afternoon thought it was less clear than usual, and stared at himself in the looking-glass, wondering whether he were not too ugly altogether, as I always told him. To tell the truth, he was not so ugly as he had been; for the months with the contessina had refined him singularly, and perhaps he had caught a certain grace of manner from the baroness. He had grown more silent, too, and seemed always preoccupied, as well he might be; but he had concealed his affair with the Lira family from me until that day, and I supposed him anxious about his appearance.

Early in the morning came De Pretis, and suggested that it would be better for Nino to take a walk and breathe the fresh air a little; so I bade him go, and I did not see him again until the afternoon. De Pretis said that the only cause for anxiety was from stage fright, and went away taking snuff and flourishing his immense cotton handkerchief. I thought a man must be a fool to work for years in order to sing, and then, when he had learned to do it quite

well, to be afraid of showing what he knew. I did not think Nino would be frightened.

Of course there was a final rehearsal at eleven, and Nino put off the hour of the lesson with the contessina to three in the afternoon, by some excuse or other. He must have felt very much pressed for time, having to give her a lesson on the very day of his coming out; and besides, he knew very well that it might be the last of his days with her, and that a great deal would depend on the way he bore himself at his trial. He sang badly, or thought he did, at the rehearsal, and grew more and more depressed and grave as the day advanced. He came out of the little stage door of the Apollo theatre at Tor di Nona, and his eyes fell upon the broad bills and posters announcing the first appearance of "Giovanni Cardegna, the most distinguished pupil of the Maestro Ercole de Pretis, in Verdi's opera the 'Favorita.'" His heart sank at the sight of his own name, and he turned towards the Bridge of Sant' Angelo to get away from it. He was the last to leave the theatre, and De Pretis was with him.

At that moment he saw Hedwig von Lira

sitting in an open carriage in front of the box office. De Pretis bowed low; she smiled; and Nino took off his hat, but would not go near her, escaping in the opposite direction. He thought she looked somewhat surprised, but his only idea was to get away, lest she should call him and put some awkward question.

An hour and a half later he entered her sitting-room. There she sat, as usual, with her books, awaiting him perhaps for the last time, a fair, girlish figure with gold hair, but oh, so cold! —it makes me shiver to think of how she used to look. Possibly there was a dreaminess about her blue eyes that made up for her manner; but how Nino could love her I cannot understand. It must have been like making love to a pillar of ice.

"I am much indebted to you for allowing me to come at this hour, signorina," he said, as he bowed.

"Ah, professore, it looks almost as though it were you yourself who were to make your *début*," said she, laughing and leaning back in her chair. "Your name is on every corner in Rome, and I was you coming out of a side door of the theatre

this morning." Nino trembled, but reflected that if she had suspected anything she would not have made so light of it.

"The fact is, signorina, my cousin is so nervous that he begged me earnestly to be present at the rehearsal this morning; and as it is the great event of his life, I could not easily refuse him. I presume you are going to hear him, since I saw your carriage at the theatre."

"Yes. At the last minute my father wanted to change our box for one nearer the stage, and so we went ourselves. The baroness—you know, the lady who went with us to the Pantheon—is going with us to-night." It was the first time Hedwig had mentioned her, and it was evident that Nino's intimacy with the baroness had been kept a secret. How long would it be so? Mechanically he proceeded with the lesson, thinking mournfully that he should never give her another. But Hedwig was more animated than he had ever seen her, and often stopped to ask questions about the coming performance. It was evident that she was entirely absorbed with the thought of at last hearing to its fullest extent the voice that

had haunted her dreams; most of all, with the anticipation of what this wonderful singer would be like. Dwelling on the echo of his singing for months had roused her interest and curiosity to such a pitch that she could hardly be quiet a moment, or think calmly of what she was to enjoy; and yet she looked so very cold and indifferent at most times. But Nino had noticed all this, and rejoiced at it; young as he was, however, he understood that the discovery she was about to make would be a shock that would certainly produce some palpable result, when she should see him from her box in the theatre. He trembled for the consequences.

The lesson was over all too soon, and Nino lingered a moment to see whether the very last drops of his cup of happiness might not still be sweet. He did not know when he should see her again, to speak with her; and though he determined it should not be long, the future seemed very uncertain, and he would look on her loveliness while he might.

"I hope you will like my cousin's singing," he said, rather timidly.

"If he sings as he has sung before, he is the greatest artist living," she said, calmly, as though no one would dispute it. "But I am curious to see him as well as to hear him."

"He is not handsome," said Nino, smiling a little. "In fact, there is a family resemblance; he is said to look like me."

"Why did you not tell me that before?" she asked, quickly, and fixed her blue eyes on Nino's face as though she wished to photograph the features in her mind.

"I did not suppose the signorina would think twice about a singer's appearance," said Nino, quietly. Hedwig blushed and turned away, busying herself with her books. At that moment Graf von Lira entered from the next room. Nino bowed.

"Curious is it," said the count, "that you and the about-to-make-his-appearance tenor should the same name have."

"He is a near relation, Signor Conte,—the same whom you heard sing in the Pantheon. I hope you will like his voice."

"That is what we shall see, Signor Professore,"

answered the other severely. He had a curious way of bowing, as though he were made only in two pieces, from his waist to his heels, and from his waist to the crown of his head. Nino went his way sadly, and wondering how Hedwig would look when she should recognise him from her box in the theatre, that very evening.

It is a terrible and a heart-tearing thing to part from the woman one loves. That is nothing new, you say. Every one knows that. Perhaps so, though I think not. Only those can know it who have experienced it, and for them no explanations are in any way at all necessary. The mere word "parting" calls up such an infinity of sorrow that it is better to draw a veil over the sad thing and bury it out of sight, and put upon it the seal on which is graven "No Hope."

Moreover, when a man only supposes, as Nino did, that he is leaving the woman he loves, or is about to leave her, until he can devise some new plan for seeing her, the case is not so very serious. Nevertheless, Nino, who is of a very tender constitution of the affections, suffered certain pangs

which are always hard to bear, and as he walked slowly down the street he hung his head low, and did not look like a man who could possibly be successful in anything he might undertake that day. Yet it was the most important day of his life, and had it not been that he had left Hedwig with little hope of ever giving her another lesson, he would have been so happy that the whole air would have seemed dancing with sunbeams and angels and flowers. I think that when a man loves he cares very little for what he does. The greatest success is indifferent to him, and he cares not at all for failure in the ordinary undertakings of life. These are my reflections, and they are worth something, because I once loved very much myself, and was parted from her I loved many times before the last parting.

It was on this day that Nino came to me and told me all the history of the past months, of which I knew nothing; but, as you know all about it, I need not tell you what the conversation was like, until he had finished. Then I told him he was the prince and chief of donkeys,

which was no more than the truth, as everybody will allow. He only spread out his palms and shrugged his shoulders, putting his head on one side, as though to say he could not help it.

"Is it perhaps my fault that you are a little donkey?" I asked; for you may imagine whether I was angry or not.

"Certainly not, Sor Cornelio," he said. "It is entirely my own doing; but I do not see that I am a donkey."

"Blood of Bacchus!" I ejaculated, holding up my hands. "He does not believe he is a great stupid!" But Nino was not angry at all. He busied himself a little with his costume, which was laid out on the piano, with the sword and the tinsel collar, and all the rest of it.

"I am in love," he said. "What would you have?"

"I would have you put a little giudizio, just a grain of judgment and common sense, into your love affairs. Why, you go about it as though it were the most innocent thing in the world to disguise yourself, and present yourself as a professor in a nobleman's house, in order to make

love to his daughter! You, to make love to a noble damigella, a young countess, with a fortune! Go back to Serveti, and marry the first contadina girl you meet; it is much more fitting, if you must needs marry at all. I repeat it, you are an ignorant donkey!"

"Eh!" cried Nino, perfectly unmoved, "if I am ignorant, it is not for lack of your teaching; and as for being the beast of burden to which you refer, I have heard it said that you were once in love yourself. Meanwhile, I have told you this, because there will perhaps be trouble, and I did not intend you to be surprised."

"Surprised?" said I. "I would not be surprised at anything you might fancy doing now. No, I would not dream of being surprised!"

"So much the better," answered Nino, imperturbably. He looked sad and weary, though, and as I am a prudent man I put my anger away to cool for a little while, and indulged in a cigar until it should be time to go to the theatre; for of course I went with him, and Mariuccia too, to help him with his dress. Poor old Mariuccia! she had dressed him when

he was a ragged little boy, and she was determined to put the finishing touches to his appearance now that he was about to be a great man, she said. His dressing-room was a narrow little place, sufficiently ill lighted, and there was barely space to turn round. Mariuccia, who had brought the cat and had her pocket full of roasted chestnuts, sat outside on a chair until he was ready for her; and I am sure that if she had spent her life in the profession of adorning players she could not have used her fingers more deftly in the arrangement of the collar and sword. Nino had a fancy to wear a moustache and a pointed beard through the first part of the opera; saying that a courtier always had hair on his face, but that he would naturally shave if he turned monk. I represented to him that it was needless expense, since he must deposit the value of the false beard with the theatre barber, who lives opposite; and it was twenty-three francs. Besides, he would look like a different man—two separate characters.

"I do not care a cabbage for that," said Nino. "If they cannot recognise me with their ears,

they need not trouble themselves to recognise me at all."

"It is a fact that their ears are quite long enough," said Mariuccia.

"Hush, Mariuccia!" I said. "The Roman public is the most intelligent public in the world." And at this she grumbled.

But I knew well enough why he wanted to wear the beard. He had a fancy to put off the evil moment as long as possible, so that Hedwig might not recognise him till the last act,—a foolish fancy, in truth, for a woman's eyes are not like a man's; and though Hedwig had never thought twice about Nino's personality, she had not sat opposite him three times a week for nearly four months without knowing all his looks and gestures. It is an absurd idea, too, to attempt to fence with time, when a thing must come in the course of an hour or two. What is it, after all, the small delay you can produce? The click of a few more seconds in the clock-work, before the hammer smites its angry warning on the bell, and leaves echoes of pain writhing through the poor bronze,—that is

Time. As for Eternity, it is a question of the calculus, and does not enter into a singer's first appearance, nor into the recognition of a lover. If it did, I would give you an eloquent dissertation upon it, so that you would yawn and take snuff, and wish me carried off by the diavolo to some place where I might lecture on the infinite without fear of being interrupted, or of keeping sinners like you unnecessarily long awake. There will be no hurry then. Poor old diavolo! he must have a dull time of it among all those heretics. Perhaps he has a little variety, for they say he has written up on his door, "Ici l'on parle français," since Monsieur de Voltaire died. But I must go on, or you will never be any wiser than you are now, which is not saying overmuch.

I am not going to give you a description of the "Favorita," which you may hear a dozen times a year at the theatre, for more or less money—but it is only a franc if you stand; quite enough, too. I went upon the stage before it began, and peeped through the curtain to see what kind of an audience there was. It is an old curtain, and

there is a hole in it on the right-hand side, which De Pretis says was made by a foreign tenor some years ago between the acts; and Jacovacci, the impresario, tried to make him pay five francs to have it repaired, but did not get the money. It is a better hole than the one in the middle, which is so far from both sides of the house that you cannot see the people well. So I looked through, and there, sure enough, in a box very near to the stage, sat the Contessina di Lira and the baroness, whom I had never seen before, but recognised from Nino's description; and behind them sat the count himself, with his great gray moustaches and a white cravat. They made me think of the time when I used to go to the theatre myself and sit in a box, and applaud or hiss, just as I pleased. Dio mio! what changes in this world!

I recognised also a great many of our noble ladies, with jewels and other ornaments, and it seemed to me that some of them were much more beautiful than the German contessina whom Nino had elected to worship, though she was well enough, to be sure, in white silk and white

fur, with her little gold cross at her throat. To think that a statue like that, brought up with all the proprieties, should have such a strange chapter of life! But my eye began to smart from peering through the little hole, and just then a rough-looking fellow connected with the stage reminded me that, whatever relation I might be to the primo tenore, I was not dressed to appear in the first act; then the audience began to stamp and groan because the performance did not begin, and I went away again to tell Nino that he had a packed house. I found De Pretis giving him blackberry syrup, which he had brought in a bottle, and entreating him to have courage. Indeed, it seemed to me that Nino had the more courage of the two; for De Pretis laughed and cried and blew his nose, and took snuff with his great fat fingers, and acted altogether like a poor fool; while Nino sat on a rush-bottomed chair and watched Mariuccia, who was stroking the old cat and nibbling roasted chestnuts, declaring all the while that Nino was the most beautiful object she had ever seen. Then the bass and the baritone came together

and spoke cheering words to Nino, and invited him to supper afterwards; but he thanked them kindly, and told them that he was expected at home, and would go with them after the next performance—if there ever were a "next." He thought he might fail at the last minute.

Nino had judged more rightly than I when he supposed that his beard and moustaches would disguise him from Hedwig during the first two acts. She recognised the wondrous voice, and she saw the strong resemblance he had spoken of. Once or twice, as he looked toward her, it seemed indeed that the eyes must be his, with their deep circles and serious gaze. But it was absurd to suppose it anything more than a resemblance. As the opera advanced, it became evident that Nino was making a success. Then in the second act it was clear that the success was growing to be an ovation, and the ovation a furore, in which the house became entirely demoralised, and vouchsafed to listen only so long as Nino was singing—screaming with delight before he had finished what he had to sing in each scene. People sent their servants

away in hot haste to buy flowers wherever they could, and he came back to his dressing-room, from the second act, carrying bouquets by the dozen, small bunches and big, such as people had been able to get or had brought with them. His eyes shone like the coals in Mariuccia's scaldino, as he entered, and he was pale through his paint. He could hardly speak for joy; but, as old habits return unconsciously at great moments in a man's life, he took the cat on his knee and pulled its tail.

"Sing thou also, little beast," he said, gravely; and he pulled the tail till the cat squeaked a little, and he was satisfied.

"Bene!" he cried; "and now for the tonsure and the frock." So Mariuccia was turned out into the passage while he changed his dress. De Pretis came back a moment later and tried to help him, but he was so much overcome that he could only shed tears and give a last word of advice for the next act.

"You must not sing it too loud, Nino mio," he said.

"Diavolo!" said Nino. "I should think not!"

"But you must not squeak it out in a little wee false voice, as small as this;" the maestro held up his thumb and finger, with a pinch of snuff between them.

"Bah! Sor Ercole, do you take me for a soprano?" cried the boy, laughing, as he washed off the paint and the gum where the beard had stuck. Presently he got into his frock, which, as I told you, was a real one, provided by Ercole's brother, the Franciscan—quite quietly, of course, for it would seem a dreadful thing to use a real monk's frock in an opera. Then we fastened the rope round his waist, and smoothed his curly hair a little to give him a more pious aspect. He looked as white as a pillow when the paint was gone.

"Tell me a little, my father," said old Mariuccia, mocking him, "do you fast on Sundays, that you look so pale?" Whereat Nino struck an attitude, and began singing a love song to the ancient woman. Indeed, she was joking about the fast, for she had expended my substance of late in fattening Nino, as she called it, for his appearance, and there was to be broiled

chickens for supper that very night. He was only pale because he was in love. As for me, I made up my mind to stand in the slides, so that I could see the contessina; for Nino had whispered to me that she had not yet recognised him, though she stared hard across the footlights. Therefore I took up a good position on the left of the stage, facing the Lira box, which was on the right.

The curtain went up, and Nino stood there, looking like a real monk, with a book in his hand and his eyes cast down, as he began to walk slowly along. I saw Hedwig von Lira's gaze rest on his square, pale face at least one whole minute. Then she gave a strange little cry, so that many people in the house looked towards her; and she leaned far back in the shadow of the deep box, while the reflected glare of the footlights just shone faintly on her features, making them look more like marble than ever. The baroness was smiling to herself, amused at her companion's surprise, and the old count stared stolidly for a moment or two, and then turned suddenly to his daughter.

"Very curious is it," he was probably saying, "that this tenor should so much your Italian professor resemble." I could almost see his gray eyes sparkle angrily across the theatre. But as I looked, a sound rose on the heated air, the like of which I have never known. To tell the truth, I had not heard the first two acts, for I did not suppose there was any great difference between Nino's singing on the stage and his singing at home, and I still wished he might have chosen some other profession. But when I heard this, I yielded, at least for the time, and I am not sure that my eyes were as clear as usual.

"Spirto gentil dei sogni miei"—the long sweet notes sighed themselves to death on his lips, falling and rising magically like a mystic angel song, and swaying their melody out into the world of lights and listeners; so pathetic, so heart-breaking, so laden with death and with love, that it was as though all the sorrowing souls in our poor Rome breathed in one soft sigh together. Only a poor monk dying of love in a monastery, tenderly and truly loving to the bitter end. Dio mio! there are perhaps many such.

But a monk like this, with a face like a conqueror, set square in its whiteness, and yet so wretched to see in his poor patched frock and his bare feet; a monk, too, not acting love, but really and truly ready to die for a beautiful woman not thirty feet from him in the house; above all, a monk with a voice that speaks like the clarion call of the day of judgment in its wrath, and murmurs more plaintively and sadly in sorrow than ever the poor Peri sighed at the gates of Paradise—such a monk, what could he not make people feel?

The great crowd of men and women sat utterly stilled and intent till he had sung the very last note. Not a sound was heard to offend the sorrow that spoke from the boy's lips. Then all those people seemed to draw three long breaths of wonder—a pause, a thrilling tremor in the air, and then there burst to the roof such a roar of cries, such a huge thunder of hands and voices, that the whole house seemed to rock with it, and even in the street outside they say the noise was deafening.

Alone on the stage stood Nino, his eyes fixed

on Hedwig von Lira in her box. I think that she alone of all that multitude made no sound, but only gripped the edge of the balcony hard in her white hands, and leaned far forward with straining eyes and beating heart to satisfy her wonder. She knew well enough, now, that there was no mistake. The humble little Professor Cardegna, who had patiently explained Dante and Leopardi to her for months, bowing to the ground in her presence, and apologising when he corrected her mistakes, as though his whole life was to be devoted to teaching foreigners his language; the decently clad young man, who was always pale, and sometimes pathetic when he spoke of himself, was no other than Giovanni Cardegna the tenor, singing aloud to earth and heaven with his glorious great voice—a man on the threshold of a European fame, such as falls only to the lot of a singer or a conqueror. More, he was the singer of her dreams, who had for months filled her thoughts with music and her heart with a strange longing, being until now a voice only. There he stood looking straight at her,—she was not mistaken,—as though to say,

"I have done it for you, and for you only." A woman must be more than marble to feel no pride in the intimate knowledge that a great public triumph has been gained solely for her sake. She must be colder than ice if she cannot see her power when a conqueror loves her.

The marble had felt the fire, and the ice was in the flame at last. Nino, with his determination to be loved, had put his statue into a very fiery furnace, and in the young innocence of his heart had prepared such a surprise for his lady as might have turned the head of a hardened woman of the world, let alone an imaginative German girl, with a taste for romance—or without; it matters little. All Germans are full of imagination, and that is the reason they know so much. For they not only know all that is known by other people, but also all that they themselves imagine, which nobody else can possibly know. And if you do not believe this, you had better read the works of one Fichte, a philosopher.

I need not tell you any more about Nino's first appearance. It was one of those really

phenomenal successes that seem to cling to certain people through life. He was very happy and very silent when it was over; and we were the last to leave the theatre, for we feared the enthusiasm of the crowd. So we waited till every one had gone, and then marched home together for it was a fine night. I walked on one side of Nino and De Pretis on the other, all of us carrying as many flowers as we could; Mariuccia came behind, with the cat under her shawl. I did not discover until we reached home why she had brought the beast. Then she explained that, as there was so much food in the kitchen in anticipation of our supper, she had been afraid to leave the cat alone in the house, lest we should find nothing left to eat when we returned. This was sufficiently prudent for a scatter-brained old spendthrift like Mariuccia.

That was a merry supper, and De Pretis became highly dramatic when we got to the second flask.

CHAPTER VII.

On the day following Nino's *début*, Maestro Ercole de Pretis found himself in hot water, and the choristers at St. Peter's noticed that his skull-cap was awry, and that he sang out of tune; and once he tried to take a pinch of snuff when there was only three bars' rest in the music, so that instead of singing C sharp he sneezed very loud. Then all the other singers giggled, and said, "Salute!"—which we always say to a person who sneezes—quite audibly.

It was not that Ercole had heard anything from the Graf von Lira as yet; but he expected to hear, and did not relish the prospect. Indeed, how could the Prussian gentleman fail to resent what the maestro had done, in introducing to him a singer disguised as a teacher? It chanced, also, that the contessina took a singing lesson

that very day in the afternoon, and it was clear that the reaping of his evil deeds was not far off. His conscience did not trouble him at all, it is true, for I have told you that he has liberal ideas about the right of marriage; but his vanity was sorely afflicted at the idea of abandoning such a very noble and creditable pupil as the Contessina di Lira. He applauded himself for furthering Nino's wild schemes, and he blamed himself for being so reckless about his own interests. Every moment he expected a formal notice from the count to discontinue the lessons. But still it did not come, and at the appointed hour Ercole's wife helped him to put on his thick winter coat, and wrapped his comforter about his neck, and pulled his big hat over his eyes,—for the weather was threatening,—and sent him trudging off to the Palazzo Carmandola.

Though Ercole is stout of heart, and has broad shoulders to bear such burdens as fall to his lot, he lingered long on the way, for his presentiments were gloomy; and at the great door of the palazzo he even stopped to inquire of the porter whether the contessina had been seen to

go out yet, half hoping that she would thus save him the mortification of an interview. But it turned out otherwise: the contessina was at home, and De Pretis was expected, as usual, to give the lesson. Slowly he climbed the great staircase, and was admitted.

"Good-day, Sor Maestro," said the liveried footman, who knew him well. "The Signor Conte desires to speak with you to-day before you go to the signorina."

The maestro's heart sank, and he gripped hard the roll of music in his hand as he followed the servant to the count's cabinet. There was to be a scene of explanation after all.

The count was seated in his great arm-chair, in a cloud of tobacco smoke, reading a Prussian military journal. His stick leaned against the table by his side, in painful contrast with the glittering cavalry sabres crossed upon the dark red wall opposite. The tall windows looked out on the piazza, and it was raining, or just beginning to rain. The great inkstand on the table was made to represent a howitzer, and the count looked as though he were ready to fire it point-

blank at any intruder. There was an air of disciplined luxury in the room, that spoke of a rich old soldier who fed his fancy with titbits from a stirring past. De Pretis felt very uncomfortable, but the nobleman rose to greet him, as he rose to greet everything above the rank of a servant, making himself steady with his stick. When De Pretis was seated he sat down also. The rain pattered against the window.

"Signor De Pretis," began the count, in tones as hard as chilled steel, "you are an honourable man." There was something interrogative in his voice.

"I hope so," answered the maestro, modestly; "like other Christians, I have a soul——"

"You will your soul take care of in your leisure moments," interrupted the count. "At present you have no leisure."

"As you command, Signor Conte."

"I was yesterday evening at the theatre. The professor you recommended for my daughter is with the new tenor one person." De Pretis spread out his hands and bowed, as if to deprecate any share in the transaction. The count

continued, "You are of the profession, Signor De Pretis. Evidently, you of this were aware."

"It is true," assented Ercole, not knowing what to say.

"Of course is it true. I am therefore to hear your explanation disposed." His gray eyes fastened sternly on the maestro. But the latter was prepared, for he had long foreseen that the count would one day be disposed to hear an explanation, as he expressed it.

"It is quite true," repeated De Pretis. "The young man was very poor, and desired to support himself while he was studying music. He was well fitted to teach our literature, and I recommended him. I hope that, in consideration of his poverty, and because he turned out a very good teacher, you will forgive me, Signor Conte."

"This talented singer I greatly applaud," answered the count, stiffly. "As a with-the-capacity-and-learning-requisite-for-teaching-endowed young man deserves he also some commendation. Also will I remember his laudable-and-not-lacking-independence character. Nevertheless, unfitting would it be should I pay

the first tenor of the opera five francs an hour to teach my daughter Italian literature." De Pretis breathed more freely.

"Then you will forgive me, Signor Conte, for endeavouring to promote the efforts of this worthy young man in supporting himself?"

"Signor De Pretis," said the count, with a certain quaint geniality, "I have my precautions observed. I examined Signor Cardegna in Italian literature in my own person, and him proficient found. Had I found him to be ignorant, and had I his talents as an operatic singer later discovered, I would you out of that window have projected." De Pretis was alarmed, for the old count looked as though he would have carried out the threat. "As it is," he concluded, "you are an honourable man, and I wish you good-morning. Lady Hedwig awaits you as usual." He rose courteously, leaning on his stick, and De Pretis bowed himself out.

He expected that the contessina would immediately begin talking of Nino, but he was mistaken; she never once referred to the opera or the singer, and except that she looked pale

and transparent, and sang with a trifle less interest in her music than usual, there was nothing noticeable in her manner. Indeed, she had every reason to be silent.

Early that morning Nino received by a messenger a pretty little note, written in execrable Italian, begging him to come and breakfast with the baroness at twelve, as she much desired to speak with him after his stupendous triumph of the previous night.

Nino is a very good boy, but he is mortal, and after the excitement of the evening he thought nothing could be pleasanter than to spend a few hours in that scented boudoir, among the palms and the beautiful objects and the perfumes, talking with a woman who professed herself ready to help him in his love affair. We have no perfumes or cushions or pretty things at number twenty-seven Santa Catarina dei Funari, though everything is very bright and neat and most proper, and the cat is kept in the kitchen, for the most part. So it is no wonder that he should have preferred to spend the morning with the baroness.

She was half lying, half sitting, in a deep arm-chair, when Nino entered; and she was reading a book. When she saw him she dropped the volume on her knee, and looked up at him from under her lids, without speaking. She must have been a bewitching figure. Nino advanced toward her, bowing low, so that his dark curling hair shaded his face.

"Good-day, signora," said he, softly, as though fearing to hurt the quiet air. "I trust I do not interrupt you?"

"You never interrupt me, Nino," she said, "except—except when you go away."

"You are very good, signora."

"For heaven's sake, no pretty speeches," said she, with a little laugh.

"It seems to me," said Nino, seating himself, "that it was you who made the pretty speech, and I who thanked you for it." There was a pause.

"How do you feel?" asked the baroness at last, turning her head to him.

"Grazie—I am well," he answered, smiling.

"Oh, I do not mean that,—you are always

well. But how do you enjoy your first triumph?"

"I think," said Nino, "that a real artist ought to have the capacity to enjoy a success at the moment, and the good sense to blame his vanity for enjoying it after it is passed."

"How old are you, Nino?"

"Did I never tell you?" he asked, innocently. "I shall be twenty-one soon."

"You talk as though you were forty, at least.

"Heaven save us!" quoth Nino.

"But really, are you not immensely flattered at the reception you had?"

"Yes."

"You did not look at all interested in the public at the time," said she, "and that Roman nose of yours very nearly turned up in disdain of the applause, I thought. I wonder what you were thinking of all the while."

"Can you wonder, baronessa?" She knew what he meant, and there was a little look of annoyance in her face when she answered.

"Ah, well, of course not, since *she* was there." Her ladyship rose, and taking a stick of Eastern

pastil from a majolica dish in a corner made Nino light it from a wax taper.

"I want the smell of the sandal-wood this morning," said she; "I have a headache." She was enchanting to look at as she bent her softly-shaded face over the flame to watch the burning perfume. She looked like a beautiful lithe sorceress making a love spell,—perhaps for her own use. Nino turned from her. He did not like to allow the one image he loved to be even for a moment disturbed by the one he loved not, however beautiful. She moved away, leaving the pastil on the dish. Suddenly she paused, and turned back to look at him.

"Why did you come to-day?" she asked.

"Because you desired it," answered Nino, in some astonishment.

"You need not have come," she said, bending down to lean on the back of a silken chair. She folded her hands and looked at him as he stood not three paces away. "Do you not know what has happened?" she asked, with a smile that was a little sad.

"I do not understand," said Nino, simply.

He was facing the entrance to the room, and saw the curtains parted by the servant. The baroness had her back to the door, and did not hear.

"Do you not know," she continued, "that you are free now? Your appearance in public has put an end to it all. You are not tied to me any longer,—unless you wish it."

As she spoke these words Nino turned white, for under the heavy curtain, lifted to admit her, stood Hedwig von Lira, like a statue, transfixed and immovable from what she had heard. The baroness noticed Nino's look, and springing back to her height from the chair on which she had been leaning, faced the door.

"My dearest Hedwig!" she cried, with a magnificent readiness. "I am so very glad you have come. I did not expect you in the least. Do take off your hat, and stay to breakfast. Ah, forgive me; this is Professor Cardegna. But you know him? Yes; now that I think, we all went to the Pantheon together." Nino bowed low, and Hedwig bent her head.

"Yes," said the young girl, coldly. "Professor Cardegna gives me lessons."

"Why, of course; how *bête* I am! I was just telling him that, since he has been successful, and is enrolled among the great artists, it is a pity he is no longer tied to giving Italian lessons,—tied to coming here three times a week to teach me literature." Hedwig smiled a strange icy smile, and sat down by the window. Nino was still utterly astonished, but he would not allow the baroness' quibble to go entirely uncontradicted.

"In truth," he said, "the Signora Baronessa's lessons consisted chiefly——"

"In teaching me pronunciation," interrupted the baroness, trying to remove Hedwig's veil and hat, somewhat against the girl's inclination. "Yes, you see how it is. I know a little of singing, but I cannot pronounce,—not in the least. Ah, these Italian vowels will be the death of me! But if there is any one who can teach a poor dilettante to pronounce them," she added, laying the hat away on a chair, and pushing a foot-stool to Hedwig's feet, "that some one is Signor Cardegna."

By this time Nino had recognised the propriety of temporising; that is to say, of letting

the baroness' fib pass for what it was worth, lest the discussion of the subject should further offend Hedwig, whose eyes wandered irresolutely toward him, as though she would say something if he addressed her.

"I hope, signorina," he said, "that it is not quite as the baroness says. I trust our lessons are not at an end?" He knew very well that they were.

"I think, Signor Cardegna," said Hedwig, with more courage than would have been expected from such a mere child,—she is twenty, but Northern people are not grown up till they are thirty, at least,—"I think it would have been more obliging if, when I asked you so much about your cousin, you had acknowledged that you had no cousin, and that the singer was none other than yourself." She blushed, perhaps, but the curtain of the window hid it.

"Alas, signorina," answered Nino, still standing before her, "such a confession would have deprived me of the pleasure—of the honour of giving you lessons."

"And pray, Signor Cardegna," put in the

baroness, "what are a few paltry lessons compared with the pleasure you ought to have experienced in satisfying the Contessina di Lira's curiosity. Really, you have little courtesy."

Nino shrank into himself, as though he were hurt, and he gave the baroness a look which said worlds. She smiled at him, in joy of her small triumph, for Hedwig was looking at the floor again and could not see. But the young girl had strength in her, for all her cold looks and white cheek.

"You can atone, Signor Cardegna," she said. Nino's face brightened.

"How, signorina?" he asked.

"By singing to us now," said Hedwig. The baroness looked grave, for she well knew what a power Nino wielded with his music.

"Do not ask him," she protested. "He must be tired,—tired to death, with all he went through last night."

"Tired?" ejaculated Nino, with some surprise. "I tired? I was never tired in my life of singing. I will sing as long as you will listen." He went to the piano. As he turned, the baroness

laid her hand on Hedwig's affectionately, as though sympathising with something she supposed to be passing in the girl's mind. But Hedwig was passive, unless a little shudder at the first touch of the baroness' fingers might pass for a manifestation of feeling. Hedwig had hitherto liked the baroness, finding in her a woman of a certain artistic sense, combined with a certain originality. The girl was an absolute contrast to the woman, and admired in her the qualities she thought lacking in herself, though she possessed too much self-respect to attempt to acquire them by imitation. Hedwig sat like a Scandinavian fairy princess on the summit of a glass hill; her friend roamed through life like a beautiful soft-footed wild animal, rejoicing in the sense of being, and sometimes indulging in a little playful destruction by the way. The girl had heard a voice in the dark, singing, and ever since then she had dreamed of the singer; but it never entered her mind to confide to the baroness her strange fancies. An undisciplined imagination, securely shielded from all outward disturbing causes, will do much with a voice in the dark,—

a great deal more than such a woman as the baroness might imagine.

I do not know enough about these blue-eyed German girls to say whether or not Hedwig had ever before thought of her unknown singer as an unknown lover. But the emotions of the previous night had shaken her nerves a little, and had she been older than she was she would have known that she loved her singer, in a distant and maidenly fashion, as soon as she heard the baroness speak of him as having been her property. And now she was angry with herself, and ashamed of feeling any interest in a man who was evidently tied to another woman by some intrigue she could not comprehend. Her coming to visit the baroness had been as unpremeditated as it was unexpected that morning, and she bitterly repented it; but being of good blood and heart, she acted as boldly as she could, and showed no little tact in making Nino sing, and thus cutting short a painful conversation. Only when the baroness tried to caress her and stroke her hand she shrank away, and the blood mantled up to her cheeks. Add to all this the womanly indignation

she felt at having been so long deceived by Nino, and you will see that she was in a very vacillating frame of mind.

The baroness was a subtle woman, reckless and diplomatic by turns, and she was not blind to the sudden repulse she met with from Hedwig, unspoken though it was. But she merely withdrew her hand, and sat thinking over the situation. What she thought, no one knows; or at least, we can only guess it from what she did afterwards. As for me, I have never blamed her at all, for she is the kind of woman I should have loved. In the meantime Nino carolled out one love song after another. He saw, however, that the situation was untenable, and after a while he rose to go. Strange to say, although the baroness had asked Nino to breakfast and the hour was now at hand she made no effort to detain him. But she gave him her hand, and said many flattering and pleasing things, which, however, neither flattered nor pleased him. As for Hedwig, she bent her head a little, but said nothing, as he bowed before her. Nino therefore went home with a heavy heart, longing to explain to Hedwig

why he had been tied to the baroness,—that it was the price of her silence and of the privilege he had enjoyed of giving lessons to the contessina; but knowing also that all explanation was out of the question for the present. When he was gone Hedwig and the baroness were left together.

"It must have been a great surprise to you, my dear," said the elder lady kindly.

"What?"

"That your little professor should turn out a great artist in disguise. It was a surprise to me, too,—ah, another illusion destroyed. Dear child! You have still so many illusions,—beautiful, pure illusions. Dieu! how I envy you!" They generally talked French together, though the baroness knows German. Hedwig laughed bravely.

"I was certainly astonished," she said. "Poor man! I suppose he did it to support himself. He never told me he gave you lessons too." The baroness smiled, but it was from genuine satisfaction this time.

"I wonder at that, since he knew we were intimate, or, at least, that we were acquainted.

Of course I would not speak of it last night, because I saw your father was angry."

"Yes, he was angry. I suppose it was natural," said Hedwig.

"Perfectly natural. And you, my dear, were you not angry too,—just a little?"

"I? No. Why should I be angry? He was a very good teacher, for he knows whole volumes by heart; and he understands them too."

Soon they talked of other things, and the baroness was very affectionate. But though Hedwig saw that her friend was kind and most friendly, she could not forget the words that were in the air when she chanced to enter, nor could she quite accept the plausible explanation of them which the baroness had so readily invented. For jealousy is the forerunner of love, and sometimes its awakener. She felt a rival and an enemy, and all the hereditary combativeness of her Northern blood was roused.

Nino, who was in no small perplexity, reflected. He was not old enough or observant enough to have seen the breach that was about to be created

between the baroness and Hedwig. His only thought was to clear himself in Hedwig's eyes from the imputation of having been tied to the dark woman in any way save for his love's sake. He at once began to hate the baroness with all the ferocity of which his heart was capable, and with all the calm his bold square face outwardly expressed. But he was forced to take some action at once, and he could think of nothing better to do than to consult De Pretis.

To the maestro he poured out his woes and his plans. He exhibited to him his position toward the baroness and toward Hedwig in the clearest light. He conjured him to go to Hedwig and explain that the baroness had threatened to unmask him, and thus deprive him of his means of support,—he dared not put it otherwise,—unless he consented to sing for her and come to her as often as she pleased. To explain, to propitiate, to smooth,—in a word, to reinstate Nino in her good opinion.

"Death of a dog!" exclaimed De Pretis; "you do not ask much! After you have allowed your lady-love, your innamorata, to catch you saying

you are bound body and soul to another woman, —and such a woman! ye saints, what a beauty! —you ask me to go and set matters right! What the diavolo did you want to go and poke your nose into such a mousetrap for? Via! I am a fool to have helped you at all."

"Very likely," said Nino calmly. "But meanwhile there are two of us, and perhaps I am the greater. You will do what I ask, maestro; is not true? And it was not I who said it; it was the baroness."

"The baroness—yes—and may the maledictions of the inferno overtake her," said De Pretis, casting up his eyes and feeling in his coat-tail pockets for his snuff-box. Once, when Nino was younger, he filled Ercole's snuff-box with soot and pepper, so that the maestro had a black nose and sneezed all day.

What could Ercole do? It was true that he had hitherto helped Nino. Was he not bound to continue that assistance? I suppose so; but if the whole affair had ended then, and this story with it, I would not have cared a button. Do you suppose it amuses me to tell you this tale?

Or that if it were not for Nino's good name I would ever have turned myself into a common story-teller? Bah! you do not know me. A page of quaternions gives me more pleasure than all this rubbish put together, though I am not averse to a little gossip now and then of an evening, if people will listen to my details and fancies. But those are just the things people will not listen to. Everybody wants sensation nowadays. What is a sensation compared with a thought? What is the convulsive gesticulation of a dead frog's leg compared with the intellect of the man who invented the galvanic battery, and thus gave fictitious sensation to all the countless generations of dead frog's legs that have since been the objects of experiment? Or if you come down to so poor a thing as mere feeling, what are your feelings in reading about Nino's deeds compared with what he felt in doing them? I am not taking all this trouble to please you, but only for Nino's sake who is my dear boy. You are of no more interest or importance to me than if you were so many dead frogs; and if I galvanise your sensations,

as you call them, into an activity sufficient to make you cry or laugh, that is my own affair. You need not say "thank you" to me. I do not want it. Ercole will thank you, and perhaps Nino will thank me, but that is different.

I will not tell you about the interview that Ercole had with Hedwig, nor how skilfully he rolled up his eyes and looked pathetic when he spoke of Nino's poverty, and of the fine part he had played in the whole business. Hedwig is a woman, and the principal satisfaction she gathered from Ercole's explanation was the knowledge that her friend the baroness had lied to her in explaining those strange words she had overheard. She knew it, of course, by instinct; but it was a great relief to be told the fact by some one else, as it always is, even when one is not a woman.

CHAPTER VIII.

SEVERAL days passed after the *début* without giving Nino an opportunity of speaking to Hedwig. He probably saw her, for he mingled in the crowd of dandies in the Piazza Colonna of an afternoon, hoping she would pass in her carriage and give him a look. Perhaps she did; he said nothing about it, but looked calm when he was silent and savage when he spoke, after the manner of passionate people. His face aged and grew stern in those few days, so that he seemed to change on a sudden from boy to man. But he went about his business, and sang at the theatre when he was obliged to; gathering courage to do his best and to display his powers from the constant success he had. The papers were full of his praises, saying that he was absolutely without rival from the very first night

he sang, matchless and supreme from the moment he first opened his mouth, and all that kind of nonsense. I dare say he is now, but he could not have been really the greatest singer living, so soon. However, he used to bring me the newspapers that had notices of him, though he never appeared to care much for them, nor did he ever keep them himself. He said he hankered for an ideal which he would never attain, and I told him that if he was never to attain it he had better abandon the pursuit of it at once. But he represented to me that the ideal was confined to his imagination, whereas the reality had a great financial importance, since he daily received offers from foreign managers to sing for them, at large advantage to himself, and was hesitating only in order to choose the most convenient. This seemed sensible, and I was silent. Soon afterwards he presented me with a box of cigars and a very pretty amber mouthpiece. The cigars were real Havanas, such as I had not smoked for years, and must have cost a great deal.

"You may not be aware, Sor Cornelio," he said one evening, as he mixed the oil and vinegar

with the salad, at supper, "that I am now a rich man, or soon shall be. An agent from the London opera has offered me twenty thousand francs for the season in London this spring."

"Twenty thousand francs!" I cried, in amazement. "You must be dreaming, Nino. That is just about seven times what I earn in a year with my professorship and my writing."

"No dreams, caro mio. I have the offer in my pocket." He apparently cared no more about it than if he had twenty thousand roasted chestnuts in his pocket.

"When do you leave us?" I asked, when I was somewhat recovered.

"I am not sure that I will go," he answered, sprinkling some pepper on the lettuce.

"Not sure! Body of Diana, what a fool you are!"

"Perhaps," said he, and he passed me the dish. Just then Mariuccia came in with a bottle of wine, and we said no more about it, for Mariuccia is indiscreet.

Nino thought nothing about his riches, because he was racking his brains for some good expedient

whereby he might see the contessina and speak with her. He had ascertained from De Pretis that the count was not so angry as he had expected, and that Hedwig was quite satisfied with the explanations of the maestro. The day after the foregoing conversation he wrote a note to her, wherein he said that if the Contessina di Lira would deign to be awake at midnight that evening she would have a serenade from a voice she was said to admire. He had Mariuccia carry the letter to the Palazzo Carmandola.

At half past eleven, at least two hours after supper, Nino wrapped himself in my old cloak and took the guitar under his arm. Rome is not a very safe place for midnight pranks, and so I made him take a good knife in his waist-belt; for he had confided to me where he was going. I tried to dissuade him from the plan, saying he might catch cold; but he laughed at me.

A serenade is an every-day affair, and in the street one voice sounds about as well as another. He reached the palace, and his heart sank when he saw Hedwig's window dark and gloomy. He

did not know that she was seated behind it in a deep chair, wrapped in white things, and listening for him against the beatings of her heart. The large moon seemed to be spiked on the sharp spire of the church that is near her house, and the black shadows cut the white light as clean as with a knife. Nino had tuned his guitar in the other street, and stood ready, waiting for the clocks to strike. Presently they clanged out wildly, as though they had been waked from their midnight sleep, and were angry; one clock answering the other, and one convent bell following another in the call to prayers. For two full minutes the whole air was crazy with ringing, and then it was all still. Nino struck a single chord. Hedwig almost thought he might hear her heart beating all the way down in the street.

"Ah, del mio dolce ardor bramato ogetto," he sang,—an old air in one of Gluck's operas that our Italian musicians say was composed by Alessandro Stradella, the poor murdered singer. It must be a very good air, for it pleases me; and I am not easily pleased with music of any kind. As for Hedwig, she pressed her ear to

the glass of the window that she might not lose any note. But she would not open nor give any sign. Nino was not so easily discouraged, for he remembered that once before she had opened her window for a few bars he had begun to sing. He played a few chords, and breathed out the "Salve, dimora casta e pura," from Faust, high and soft and clear. There is a point in that song, near to the end, where the words say, "Reveal to me the maiden," and where the music goes away to the highest note that any one can possibly sing. It always appears quite easy for Nino, and he does not squeak like a dying pig as all the other tenors do on that note. He was looking up as he sang it, wondering whether it would have any effect. Apparently Hedwig lost her head completely, for she gently opened the casement and looked out at the moonlight opposite, over the carved stone mullions of her window. The song ended, he hesitated whether to go or to sing again. She was evidently looking towards him; but he was in the light, for the moon had risen higher, and she, on the other side of the street, was in the dark.

"Signorina!" he called, softly. No answer. "Signorina!" he said again, coming across the empty street and standing under the window, which might have been thirty feet from the ground.

"Hush!" came a whisper from above.

"I thank you with all my soul for listening to me," he said, in a low voice. "I am innocent of that of which you suspect me. I love you, ah, I love you!" But at this she left the window very quickly. She did not close it, however, and Nino stood long, straining his eyes for a glimpse of the white face that had been there. He sighed, and, striking a chord, sang out boldly the old air from the Trovatore, "Ah, che la morte ognora è tarda nel venir." Every blind fiddler in the streets plays it, though he would be sufficiently scared if death came any the quicker for his fiddling. But old and worn as it is it has a strain of passion in it, and Nino threw more fire and voice into the ring of it than ever did famous old Boccardè, when he sang it at the first performance of the opera, thirty and odd years ago. As he played the chords after the first strophe, the voice from above whispered again:

"Hush, for Heaven's sake!" Just that, and something fell at his feet, with a soft little padded sound on the pavement. He stooped to pick it up, and found a single rose; and at that instant the window closed sharply. Therefore he kissed the rose and hid it, and presently he strode down the street, finishing his song as he went, but only humming it, for the joy had taken his voice away. I heard him let himself in and go to bed, and he told me about it in the morning. That is how I know.

Since the day after the *début* Nino had not seen the baroness. He did not speak of her, and I am sure he wished she were at the very bottom of the Tiber. But on the morning after the serenade he received a note from her, which was so full of protestations of friendship and so delicately couched that he looked grave, and reflected that it was his duty to be courteous, and to answer such a call as that. She begged him earnestly to come at one o'clock; she was suffering from headache, she said, and was very weak. Had Nino loved Hedwig a whit the less he would not have gone. But he felt himself

strong enough to face anything and everything, and therefore he determined to go.

He found her, indeed, with the manner of a person who is ill, but not with the appearance. She was lying on a huge couch, pushed to the fireside, and there were furs about her. A striped scarf of rich Eastern silk was round her throat, and she held in her hand a new novel, of which she carelessly cut the pages with a broad-hafted Persian knife. But there was colour in her dark cheek, and a sort of angry fire in her eyes. Nino thought the clean steel in her hand looked as though it might be used for something besides cutting leaves, if the fancy took her.

"So at last you have honoured me with a visit, signore," she said, not desisting from her occupation. Nino came to her, and she put out her hand. He touched it, but could not bear to hold it, for it burned him.

"You used to honour my hand differently from that," she half whispered. Nino sat himself down a little way from her, blushing slightly. It was not at what she had said, but at the thought that he should ever have kissed her fingers.

"Signora," he replied, "there are customs, chivalrous and gentle in themselves, and worthy for all men to practise. But from the moment a custom begins to mean what it should not, it ought to be abandoned. You will forgive me if I no longer kiss your hand."

"How cold you are!—how formal! What should it mean?"

"It is better to say too little than too much," he answered.

"Bah!" she cried, with a bitter little laugh. "Words are silver, but silence—is very often nothing but silver-plated brass. Put a little more wood on the fire; you make me cold." Nino obeyed.

"How literal you are!" said the baroness, petulantly. "There is fire enough on the hearth."

"Apparently, signora, you are pleased to be enigmatical," said Nino.

"I will be pleased to be anything I please," she answered, and looked at him rather fiercely. "I wanted you to drive away my headache, and you only make it worse."

"I am sorry, signora. I will leave you at once. Permit me to wish you a very good-morning." He took his hat and went towards the door. Before he reached the heavy curtain, she was at his side with a rush like a falcon on the wing, her eyes burning darkly between anger and love.

"Nino!" She laid hold of his arm, and looked into his face.

"Signora," he protested, coldly, and drew back.

"You will not leave me so?"

"As you wish, signora. I desire to oblige you."

"Oh, how cold you are!" she cried, leaving his arm, and sinking into a chair by the door, while he stood with his hand on the curtain. She hid her eyes. "Nino, Nino! You will break my heart!" she sobbed; and a tear, perhaps more of anger than of sorrow, burst through her fingers, and coursed down her cheek.

Few men can bear to see a woman shed tears. Nino's nature rose up in his throat, and bade him console her. But between him and her was a fair, bright image that forbade him to move hand or foot.

"Signora," he said, with all the calm he could command, "if I were conscious of having by word or deed of mine given you cause to speak thus, I would humbly implore your forgiveness. But my heart does not accuse me. I beg you to allow me to take leave of you. I will go away, and you shall have no further cause to think of me." He moved again, and lifted the curtain. But she was like a panther, so quick and beautiful. Ah, how I could have loved that woman! She held him, and would not let him go, her smooth fingers fastening round his wrists like springs.

"Please to let me go," he said, between his teeth, with rising anger.

"No! I will not let you!" she cried, fiercely, tightening her grasp on him. Then the angry fire in her tearful eyes seemed suddenly to melt into a soft flame, and the colour came faster to her cheeks. "Ah, how can you let me so disgrace myself! how can you see me fallen so low as to use the strength of my hands, and yet have no pity? Nino, Nino, do not kill me!"

"Indeed, it would be the better for you if I

should," he answered, bitterly, but without attempting to free his wrists from the strong, soft grip.

"But you will," she murmured, passionately. "You are killing me by leaving me. Can you not see it?" Her voice melted away in the tearful cadence. But Nino stood gazing at her as stonily as though he were the Sphinx. How could he have the heart? I cannot tell. Long she looked into his eyes, silently; but she might as well have tried to animate a piece of iron, so stern and hard he was. Suddenly, with a strong, convulsive movement, she flung his hands from her.

"Go!" she cried, hoarsely. "Go to that wax doll you love, and see whether she will love you, or care whether you leave her or not! Go, go, go! Go to her!" She had sprung far back from him, and now pointed to the door, drawn to her full height and blazing in her wrath.

"I would advise you, madam, to speak with proper respect of any lady with whom you choose to couple my name." His lips opened and shut mechanically, and he trembled from head to foot.

"Respect!" She laughed wildly. "Respect for a mere child whom you happen to fancy! Respect, indeed, for anything you choose to do! I—I—respect Hedwig von Lira? Ha! ha!" and she rested her hand on the table behind her, as she laughed.

"Be silent, madam," said Nino, and he moved a step nearer, and stood with folded arms.

"Ah! You would silence me now, would you? You would rather not hear me speak of your midnight serenades, and your sweet letters dropped from the window of her room at your feet?" But her rage overturned itself, and with a strange cry she fell into a deep chair and wept bitterly, burying her face in her two hands. "Miserable woman that I am!" she sobbed, and her whole lithe body was convulsed.

"You are indeed," said Nino, and he turned once more to go. But as he turned, the servant threw back the curtain.

"The Signor Conte di Lira," he announced, in distinct tones. For a moment there was a dead silence, during which, in spite of his astonishment at the sudden appearance of the count,

Nino had time to reflect that the baroness had caused him to be watched during the previous night. It might well be, and the mistake she made in supposing the thing Hedwig had dropped to be a letter told him that her spy had not ventured very near.

The tall count came forward under the raised curtains, limping and helping himself with his stick. His face was as gray and wooden as ever, but his moustaches had an irritated, crimped look, that Nino did not like. The count barely nodded to the young man, as he stood aside to let the old gentleman pass; his eyes turned mechanically to where the baroness sat. She was a woman who had no need to simulate passion in any shape, and it must have cost her a terrible effort to control the paroxysm of anger and shame and grief that had overcome her. There was something unnatural and terrifying in her sudden calm, as she forced herself to rise and greet her visitor.

"I fear I come out of season," he said, apologetically, as he bent over her hand.

"On the contrary," she answered; "but forgive

me if I speak one word to Professor Cardegna." She went to where Nino was standing.

"Go into that room," she said, in a very low voice, glancing towards a curtained door opposite the windows, "and wait till he goes. You may listen if you choose." She spoke authoritatively.

"I will not," answered Nino, in a determined whisper.

"You will not?" Her eyes flashed again. He shook his head.

"Count von Lira," she said aloud, turning to him, "do you know this young man?" She spoke in Italian, and Von Lira answered in the same language; but as what he said was not exactly humorous, I will spare you the strange construction of his sentences.

"Perfectly," he answered. "It is precisely concerning this young man that I desire to speak with you." The count remained standing because the baroness had not told him to be seated.

"That is fortunate," replied the baroness, "for I wish to inform you that he is a villain, a wretch, a miserable fellow!" Her anger was rising again, but she struggled to control it.

When Nino realised what she said, he came forward, and stood near the count, facing the baroness, his arms folded on his breast, as though to challenge accusation. The count raised his eyebrows.

"I am aware that he concealed his real profession so long as he gave my daughter lessons. That, however, has been satisfactorily explained, though I regret it. Pray inform me why you designate him as a villain." Nino felt a thrill of sympathy for this man whom he had so long deceived.

"This man, sir," said she, in measured tones, "this low-born singer, who has palmed himself off on us as a respectable instructor in language, has the audacity to love your daughter. For the sake of pressing his odious suit he has wormed himself into your house as into mine; he has sung beneath your daughter's window, and she has dropped letters to him,—love-letters, do you understand? And now,"—her voice rose more shrill and uncontrollable at every word, as she saw Lira's face turn white, and her anger gave desperate utterance to the lie,—"and now he has

the effrontery to come to me—to me—to me of all women—and to confess his abominable passion for that pure angel, imploring me to assist him in bringing destruction upon her and you. Oh, it is execrable, it is vile, it is hellish!" She pressed her hands to her temples as she stood, and glared at the two men. The count was a strong man, easily petulant, but hard to move to real anger. Though his face was white and his right hand clutched his crutch-stick, he still kept the mastery of himself.

"Is what you tell me true, madam?" he asked, in a strange voice.

"Before God, it is true!" she cried, desperately.

The old man looked at her for one moment, and then, as though he had been twenty years younger, he made at Nino, brandishing his stick to strike. But Nino is strong and young, and he is almost a Roman. He foresaw the count's action, and his right hand stole to the table and grasped the clean, murderous knife; the baroness had used it so innocently to cut the leaves of her book half an hour before. With one wrench he had disarmed the elder man, forced him back

upon a lounge, and set the razor edge of his weapon against the count's throat.

"If you speak one word, or try to strike me, I will cut off your head," he said, quietly, bringing his cold, marble face close down to the old man's eyes. There was something so deathly in his voice, in spite of its quiet sound, that the count thought his hour was come, brave man as he was. The baroness tottered back against the opposite wall, and stood staring at the two, dishevelled and horrified.

"This woman," said Nino, still holding the cold thing against the flesh, "lies in part, and in part tells the truth. I love your daughter, it is true." The poor old man quivered beneath Nino's weight, and his eyes rolled wildly, searching for some means of escape. But it was of no use. "I love her, and have sung beneath her window; but I never had a written word from her in my life, and I neither told this woman of my love nor asked her assistance. She guessed it at the first; she guessed the reason of my disguise, and she herself offered to help me. You may speak now. Ask her."

Nino relaxed his hold, and stood off, still grasping the knife. The old count breathed, shook himself and passed his handkerchief over his face before he spoke. The baroness stood as though she were petrified.

"Thunder weather, you are a devilish young man!" said Von Lira, still panting. Then he suddenly recovered his dignity. "You have caused me to assault this young man by what you told me," he said, struggling to his feet. "He defended himself, and might have killed me, had he chosen. Be good enough to tell me whether he has spoken the truth or you."

"He has spoken—the truth," answered the baroness, staring vacantly about her. Her fright had taken from her even the faculty of lying. Her voice was low, but she articulated the words distinctly. Then, suddenly, she threw up her hands, with a short quick scream, and fell forward, senseless, on the floor. Nino looked at the count, and dropped his knife on a table. The count looked at Nino.

"Sir," said the old gentleman, "I forgive you

for resisting my assault. I do not forgive you for presuming to love my daughter, and I will find means to remind you of the scandal you have brought on my house." He drew himself up to his full height. Nino handed him his crutch-stick civilly.

"Signor Conte," he said, simply, but with all his natural courtesy, "I am sorry for this affair, to which you forced me,—or rather the Signora Baronessa forced us both. I have acted foolishly, perhaps, but I am in love. And permit me to assure you, sir, that I will yet marry the Signorina di Lira, if she consents to marry me."

"By the name of Heaven," swore the old count, "if she wants to marry a singer, she shall." He limped to the door in sullen anger, and went out. Nino turned to the prostrate figure of the poor baroness. The continued strain on her nerves had broken her down, and she lay on the floor in a dead faint. Nino put a cushion from the lounge under her head, and rang the bell. The servant appeared instantly.

"Bring water quickly!" he cried. "The signora has fainted." He stood looking at the

senseless figure of the woman, as she lay across the rich Persian rugs that covered the floor.

"Why did you not bring salts, cologne, her maid—run, I tell you!" he said to the man, who brought the glass of water on a gilded tray. He had forgotten that the fellow could not be expected to have any sense. When her people came at last, he had sprinkled her face, and she had unconsciously swallowed enough of the water to have some effect in reviving her. She began to open her eyes, and her fingers moved nervously. Nino found his hat, and, casting one glance around the room that had just witnessed such strange doings, passed through the door and went out. The baroness was left with her servants. Poor woman! She did very wrong, perhaps, but anybody would have loved her—except Nino. She must have been terribly shaken, one would have thought, and she ought to have gone to lie down, and should have sent for the doctor to bleed her. But she did nothing of the kind.

She came to see me. I was alone in the house, late in the afternoon, when the sun was

just gilding the tops of the houses. I heard the door-bell ring, and I went to answer it myself. There stood the beautiful baroness, alone, with all her dark soft things around her, as pale as death, and her eyes swollen sadly with weeping. Nino had come home and told me something about the scene in the morning, and I can tell you I gave him a piece of my mind about his follies.

"Does Professor Cornelio Grandi live here?" she asked, in a low, sad voice.

"I am he, signora," I answered. "Will you please to come in?" And so she came into our little sitting-room, and sat over there in the old green arm-chair. I shall never forget it as long as I live.

I cannot tell you all she said in that brief half-hour, for it pains me to think of it. She spoke as though I were her confessor, so humbly and quietly,—as though it had all happened ten years ago. There is no stubbornness in those tiger women when once they break down.

She said she was going away; that she had done my boy a great wrong, and wished to make

such reparation as she could, by telling me, at least, the truth. She did not scruple to say that she had loved him, nor that she had done everything in her power to keep him; though he had never so much as looked at her, she added, pathetically. She wished to have me know exactly how it happened, no matter what I might think of her.

"You are a nobleman, count," she said to me at last, "and I can trust you as one of my own people, I am sure. Yes, I know: you have been unfortunate, and are now a professor. But that does not change the blood. I can trust you. You need not tell him I came, unless you wish it. I shall never see him again. I am glad to have been here, to see where he lives." She rose, and moved to go. I confess that the tears were in my eyes. There was a pile of music on the old piano. There was a loose leaf on the top, with his name written on it. She took it in her hand, and looked inquiringly at me out of her sad eyes. I knew she wanted to take it, and I nodded.

"I shall never see him again, you know."

Her voice was gentle and weak, and she hastened to the door; so that almost before I knew it she was gone. The sun had left the red-tiled roofs opposite, and the goldfinch was silent in his cage. So I sat down in the chair where she had rested, and folded my hands, and thought, as I am always thinking ever since, how I could have loved such a woman as that; so passionate, so beautiful, so piteously sorry for what she had done that was wrong. Ah me! for the years that are gone away so cruelly, for the days so desperately dead! Give me but one of those golden days, and I would make the pomp of emperors ridiculous. A greater man than I said that,—a man over the seas, with a great soul, who wrote in a foreign tongue, but spoke a language germane to all human speech. But even he cannot bring back one of those dear days. I would give much to have that one day back, when she came and told me all her woes. But that is impossible.

When they came to wake her in the morning —the very morning after that—she was dead in her bed; the colour gone for ever from those

velvet cheeks, the fire quenched out of those passionate eyes, past power of love or hate to rekindle. *Requiescat in pace,* and may God give her eternal rest and forgiveness for all her sins. Poor, beautiful, erring woman!

CHAPTER IX.

At nine o'clock on the morning of the baroness' death, as Nino was busy singing scales, there was a ring at the door, and presently Mariuccia came running in as fast as her poor old legs could carry her, and whiter than a pillow-case, to say that there was a man at the door with two gendarmes, asking for Nino; and before I could question her, the three men walked unbidden into the room, demanding which was Giovanni Cardegna, the singer. Nino started, and then said quietly that he was the man. I have had dealings with these people, and I know what is best to be done. They were inclined to be rough and very peremptory. I confess I was frightened; but I think I am more cunning when I am a little afraid.

"Mariuccia," I said, as she stood trembling in

the doorway, waiting to see what would happen, "fetch a flask of that old wine, and serve these gentlemen,—and a few chestnuts, if you have some. Be seated, signori," I said to them, "and take one of these cigars. My boy is a singer, and you would not hurt his voice by taking him out so early on this raw morning. Sit down Nino, and ask these gentlemen what they desire." They all sat down, somewhat sullenly, and the gendarmes' sabres clanked on the brick floor.

"What do you wish from me?" asked Nino, who was not much moved after the first surprise.

"We regret to say," answered the man in plain clothes, "that we are here to arrest you."

"May I inquire on what charge?" I asked. "But first let me fill your glasses. Dry throats make surly answers, as the proverb says." They drank. It chanced that the wine was good, being from my own vineyard,—my little vineyard that I bought outside of Porta Salara,—and the men were cold and wet, for it was raining.

"Well," said the man who had spoken before, —he was clean-shaved and fat, and he smacked his lips over the wine,—"it is not our way to

answer questions. But since you are so civil, I will tell you that you are arrested on supicion of having poisoned that Russian baroness, with the long name, at whose house you have been so intimate."

"Poisoned? The baroness poisoned? Is she very ill, then?" asked Nino, in great alarm.

"She is dead," said the fat man, wiping his mouth and twisting the empty glass in his hand.

"Dead!" cried Nino and I together.

"Dead—yes; as dead as St. Peter," he answered, irreverently. "Your wine is good, Signor Professore. Yes, I will take another glass—and my men, too. Yes, she was found dead this morning, lying in her bed. You were there yesterday, Signor Cardegna, and her servant says he saw you giving her something in a glass of water." He drank a long draught from his glass. "You would have done better to give her some of this wine, my friend. She would certainly be alive to-day." But Nino was dark and thoughtful. He must have been pained and terribly shocked at the sudden news, of course, but he did not admire her as I did.

"Of course this thing will soon be over," he said at last. "I am very much grieved to hear of the lady's death, but it is absurd to suppose that I was concerned in it, however it happened. She fainted suddenly in the morning when I was there, and I gave her some water to drink, but there was nothing in it." He clasped his hands on his knee, and looked much distressed.

"It is quite possible that you poisoned her," remarked the fat man, with annoying indifference. "The servant says he overheard high words between you——"

"He overheard?" cried Nino, springing to his feet. "Cursed beast, to listen at the door!" He began to walk about excitedly. "How long is this affair to keep me?" he asked, suddenly; "I have to sing to-night—and that poor lady lying there dead—oh, I cannot!"

"Perhaps you will not be detained more than a couple of hours," said the fat man. "And perhaps you will be detained until the Day of Judgment," he added, with a sly wink at the gendarmes, who laughed obsequiously. "By this afternoon, the doctors will know of what she died;

and if there was no poison, and she died a natural death, you can go to the theatre and sing, if you have the stomach. I would, I am sure. You see, she is a great lady, and the people of her embassy are causing everything to be done very quickly. If you had poisoned that old lady who brought us this famous wine a minute ago, you might have had to wait till next year, innocent or guilty." It struck me that the wine was producing its effect.

"Very well," said Nino, resolutely; "let us go. You will see that I am perfectly ready, although the news has shaken me much; and so you will premit me to walk quietly with you, without attracting any attention?"

"Oh, we would not think of incommoding you," said the fat man. "The orders were expressly to give you every convenience, and we have a private carriage below. Signor Grandi, we thank you for your civility. Good-morning—a thousand excuses." He bowed, and the gendarmes rose to their feet, refreshed and ruddy with the good wine. Of course I knew I could not accompany them, and I was too much frightened to

have been of any use. Poor Mariuccia was crying in the kitchen.

"Send word to Jacovacci, the manager, if you do not hear by twelve o'clock," Nino called back from the landing, and the door closed behind them all. I was left alone, sad and frightened, and I felt very old,—much older than I am.

It was tragic. Mechanically I sank into the old green arm-chair, where she had sat but yesterday evening,—she whom I had seen but twice, once in the theatre and once here, but of whom I had heard so much. And she was dead, so soon. If Nino could only have heard her last words and seen her last look, he would have been more hurt when he heard of her sudden death. But he is of stone, that man, save for his love and his art. He seems to have no room left for sympathy with human ills, nor even for fear on his own account. Fear!—how I hate the word! Nino did not seem frightened at all, when they took him away. But as for me—well, it was not for myself this time, at least. That is some comfort. I think one may be afraid for other people.

Mariuccia was so much disturbed that I was obliged to go myself to get De Pretis, who gave up all his lessons that day and came to give me his advice. He looked grave and spoke very little, but he is a broad-shouldered, genial man, and very comforting. He insisted on going himself at once to see Nino, to give him all the help he could. He would not hear of my going, for he said I ought to be bled and have some tea of mallows to calm me. And when I offered him a cigar from the box of good ones Nino had given me, he took six or seven, and put them in his pocket without saying a word. But I did not grudge them to him; for though he is very ridiculous, with his skull-cap and his snuff-box, he is a leal man, as we say, who stands by his friends and snaps his fingers at the devil.

I cannot describe to you the anxiety I felt through all that day. I could not eat, nor drink, nor write. I could not smoke, and when I tried to go to sleep, that cat—an apoplexy on her!—climbed up on my shoulder and clawed my hair. Mariuccia sat moaning in the kitchen, and could not cook at all, so that I was half starved.

At three o'clock De Pretis came back.

"Courage, conte mio!" he cried; and I knew it was all right. "Courage! Nino is at liberty again, and says he will sing to-night to show them he is not a clay doll, to be broken by a little knocking about. Ah, what a glorious boy Nino is!"

"But where is he?" I asked, when I could find voice to speak, for I was all trembling.

"He is gone for a good walk, to freshen his nerves, poverino. I wonder he has any strength left. For Heaven's sake, give me a match that I may light my cigar, and then I will tell you all about it. Thank you. And I will sit down, comfortably—so. Now you must know that the baroness—*requiescat!*—was not poisoned by Nino, or by any one else."

"Of course not! Go on."

"Piano,—slow and sure. They had a terrific scene yesterday. You know? Yes. Then she went out and tired herself, poor soul, so that when she got home she had an attack of the nerves. Now these foreigners, who are a pack of silly people, do not have themselves bled and drink malva water as we do when we get a fit

of anger. But they take opium; that is, a thing they call chloral. God knows what it is made of, but it puts them to sleep, like opium. When the doctors came to look at the poor lady, they saw at once what was the matter, and called the maid. The maid said her mistress certainly had some green stuff in a little bottle which she often used to take; and when they inquired further they heard that the baroness had poured out much more than usual the night before, while the maid was combing her hair, for she seemed terribly excited and restless. So they got the bottle and found it nearly empty. Then the doctors said, 'At what time was this young man who is now arrested seen to give her the glass of water?' The man-servant said it was about two in the afternoon. So the doctors knew that if Nino had given her the chloral she could not have gone out afterwards, and have been awake at eleven in the evening when her maid was with her, and yet have been hurt by what he gave her. And so, as Jacovacci was raising a thousand devils in every corner of Rome because they had arrested his principal singer on false pretences, and was

threatening to bring suits against everybody, including the Russian embassy, the doctors, and the government, if Nino did not appear in *Faust* to-night, according to his agreement, the result was that, half an hour ago, Nino was conducted out of the police precincts with ten thousand apologies, and put into the arms of Jacovacci, who wept for joy, and carried him off to a late breakfast at Morteo's. And then I came here. But I made Nino promise to take a good walk for his digestion, since the weather has changed. For a breakfast at three in the afternoon may be called late, even in Rome. And that reminds me to ask you for a drop of wine; for I am still fasting, and this talking is worse for the throat than a dozen high masses."

Mariuccia had been listening at the door, as usual, and she immediately began crying for joy; for she is a weak-minded old thing, and dotes on Nino. I was very glad myself, I can tell you; but I could not understand how Nino could have the heart to sing, or should lack heart so much as to be fit for it. Before the evening he came home, silent and thoughtful. I asked

him whether he were not glad to be free so easily.

"That is not a very intelligent question for a philosopher like you to ask," he answered. "Of course I am glad of my liberty; any man would be. But I feel that I am as much the cause of that poor lady's death as though I had killed her with my own hands. I shall never forgive myself."

"Diana!" I cried, "it is a horrible tragedy; but it seems to me that you could not help it if she chose to love you."

"Hush!" said he, so sternly that he frightened me. "She is dead. God give her soul rest. Let us not talk of what she did."

"But," I objected, "if you feel so strongly about it, how can you sing at the opera to-night?"

"There are plenty of reasons why I should sing. In the first place, I owe it to my engagement with Jacovacci. He has taken endless trouble to have me cleared at once, and I will not disappoint him. Besides, I have not lost my voice, and might be half ruined by breaking contract so early. Then, the afternoon papers are full of the

whole affair, some right and some wrong, and I am bound to show the Contessina di Lira that this unfortunate accident does not touch my heart, however sorry I may be. If I did not appear all Rome would say it was because I was heart-broken. If she does not go to the theatre, she will at least hear of it. Therefore I will sing." It was very reasonable of him to think so.

"Have any of the papers got hold of the story of your giving lessons?"

"No, I think not; and there is no mention of the Lira family."

"So much the better."

Hedwig did not go to the opera. Of course she was quite right. However she might feel about the baroness, it would have been in the worst possible taste to go to the opera the very day after her death. That is the way society puts it. It is bad taste; they never say it is heartless, or unkind, or brutal. It is simply bad taste. Nino sang, on the whole, better than if she had been there, for he put his whole soul in his art and won fresh laurels. When it was over

he was besieged by the agent of the London manager to come to some agreement.

"I cannot tell yet," he said. "I will tell you soon." He was not willing to leave Rome,—that was the truth of the matter. He thought of nothing, day or night, but of how he might see Hedwig, and his heart writhed in his breast when it seemed more and more impossible. He dared not risk compromising her by another serenade, as he felt sure that it had been some servant of the count who had betrayed him to the baroness. At last he hit upon a plan. The funeral of the baroness was to take place on the afternoon of the next day. He felt sure that the Graf von Lira would go to it, and he was equally certain that Hedwig would not. It chanced to be the hour at which De Pretis went to the palazzo to give her the singing lesson.

"I suppose it is a barbarous thing for me to do," he said to himself, "but I cannot help it. Love first, and tragedy afterwards."

In the afternoon, therefore, he sallied out, and went boldly to the Palazzo Carmandola. He inquired of the porter whether the Signor Conte

had gone out, and just as he had expected, so he found it. Old Lira had left the house ten minutes earlier, to go to the funeral. Nino ran up the stairs and rang the bell. The footman opened the door, and Nino quickly slipped a five-franc note into his hand, which he had no difficulty in finding. On asking if the signorina were at home, the footman nodded, and added that Professor De Pretis was with her, but she would doubtless see Professor Cardegna as well. And so it turned out. He was ushered into the great drawing-room, where the piano was. Hedwig came forward a few steps from where she had been standing beside De Pretis, and Nino bowed low before her. She had on a long dark dress, and no ornament whatever, save her beautiful bright hair, so that her face was like a jewel set in gold and velvet. But, when I think of it, such a combination would seem absurdly vulgar by the side of Hedwig von Lira. She was so pale and exquisite and sad that Nino could hardly look at her. He remembered that there were violets, rarest of flowers in Rome in January, in her belt.

To tell the truth, Nino had expected to find her stern and cold, whereas she was only very quiet and sorrowful.

"Will you forgive me, signorina, for this rashness?" he asked, in a low voice.

"In that I receive you I forgive you, sir," she said. He glanced toward De Pretis, who seemed absorbed in some music at the piano and was playing over bits of an accompaniment. She understood, and moved slowly to a window at the other end of the great room, standing among the curtains. He placed himself in the embrasure. She looked at him long and earnestly, as if finally reconciling the singer with the man she had known so long. She found him changed, as I had, in a short time. His face was sterner and thinner and whiter than before, and there were traces of thought in the deep shadows beneath his eyes. Quietly observing him, she saw how perfectly simple and exquisitely careful was his dress, and how his hands bespoke that attention which only a gentleman gives to the details of his person. She saw that, if he were not handsome, he was in the last degree striking to the

eye, in spite of all his simplicity, and that he would not lose by being contrasted with all the dandies and courtiers in Rome. As she looked, she saw his lip quiver slightly, the only sign of emotion he ever gives, unless he loses his head altogether, and storms, as he sometimes does.

"Signorina," he began, "I have come to tell you a story; will you listen to it?"

"Tell it me," said she, still looking in his face.

"There was once a solitary castle in the mountains, with battlement and moat both high and broad. Far up in a lonely turret dwelt a rare maiden, of such surpassing beauty and fairness that the peasants thought she was not mortal, but an angel from heaven, resting in that tower from the doing of good deeds. She had flowers up there in her chamber, and the seeds of flowers; and as the seasons passed by, she took from her store the dry germs, and planted them one after another in a little earth on the window-sill. And the sun shone on them and they grew, and she breathed upon them and they were sweet. But they withered and bore no offspring, and fell away, so that year by year her store became

diminished. At last there was but one little paper bag of seed left, and upon the cover was written in a strange character, 'This is the Seed of the Thorn of the World.' But the beautiful maiden was sad when she saw this, for she said, 'All my flowers have been sweet, and now I have but this thing left, which is a thorn!' And she opened the paper and looked inside, and saw one poor little seed all black and shrivelled. Through that day she pondered what to do with it, and was very unhappy. At night she said to herself, 'I will not plant this one; I will throw it away rather than plant it.' And she went to the window, and tore the paper, and threw out the little seed into the darkness."

"Poor little thing!" said Hedwig. She was listening intently.

"She threw it out, and, as it fell, all the air was full of music, sad and sweet, so that she wondered greatly. The next day she looked out of the window, and saw, between the moat and the castle wall, a new plant growing. It looked black and uninviting, but it had come up so fast that it had already laid hold on the rough gray

stones. At the falling of the night it reached far up towards the turret, a great sharp-pointed vine, with only here and there a miserable leaf on it. 'I am sorry I threw it out,' said the maiden. 'It is the Thorn of the World, and the people who pass will think it defaces my castle.' But when it was dark again the air was full of music. The maiden went to the window, for she could not sleep, and she called out, asking who it was that sang. Then a sweet, low voice came up to her from the moat. 'I am the Thorn,' it said, 'I sing in the dark, for I am growing.' 'Sing on, Thorn,' said she, 'and grow if you will.' But in the morning, when she awoke, her window was darkened, for the Thorn had grown to be a mighty tree, and its topmost shoots were black against the sky. She wondered whether this uncouth plant would bear anything but music. So she spoke to it.

"'Thorn,' she said, 'why have you no flowers?'

"'I am the Thorn of the World,' it answered, 'and I can bear no flowers until the hand that planted me has tended me, and pruned me, and shaped me to be its own. If you had planted

me like the rest, it would have been easy for you. But you planted me unwillingly, down below you by the moat, and I have had far to climb.'

"'But my hands are so delicate,' said the maiden. 'You will hurt me, I am sure.'

"'Yours is the only hand in the world that I will not hurt,' said the voice, so tenderly and softly and sadly that the gentle fingers went out to touch the plant and see if it were real. And touching it they clung there, for they had no harm of it. Would you know my lady, what happened then?"

"Yes, yes—tell me!" cried Hedwig, whose imagination was fascinated by the tale.

"As her hands rested on the spiked branches, a gentle trembling went through the Thorn, and in a moment there burst out such a blooming and blossoming as the maiden had never seen. Every prick became a rose, and they were so many that the light of the day was tinged with them, and their sweetness was like the breath of paradise. But below her window the Thorn was as black and forbidding as ever, for only the maiden's presence could make its flowers bloom. But she smelled

the flowers, and pressed many of them to her cheek.

"'I thought you were only a Thorn,' she said, softly.

"'Nay, fairest maiden,' answered the glorious voice of the bursting blossom, 'I am the Rose of the World for ever, since you have touched me.'

"That is my story, signorina. Have I wearied you?"

Hedwig had unconsciously moved nearer to him as he was speaking, for he never raised his voice, and she hung on his words. There was colour in her face, and her breath came quickly through her parted lips. She had never looked so beautiful.

"Wearied me, signore? Ah no; it is a gentle tale of yours."

"It is a true tale—in part," said he.

"In part? I do not understand——" But the colour was warmer in her cheek, and she turned her face half away, as though looking out.

"I will tell you," he replied, coming closer, on the side from which she turned. "Here is the window. You are the maiden. The thorn—it

is my love for you;" he dropped his voice to a whisper. "You planted it carelessly, far below you in the dark. In the dark it has grown and sung to you, and grown again, until now it stands in your own castle window. Will you not touch it and make its flowers bloom for you?" He spoke fervently. She had turned her face quite from him now, and was resting her forehead against one hand that leaned upon the heavy frame of the casement. The other hand hung down by her side toward him, fair as a lily against her dark gown. Nino touched it, then took it. He could see the blush spread to her white throat, and fade again. Between the half-falling curtain and the great window he bent his knee and pressed her fingers to his lips. She made as though she would withdraw her hand, and then left it in his. Her glance stole to him as he kneeled there, and he felt it on him, so that he looked up. She seemed to raise him with her fingers, and her eyes held his and drew them; he stood up, and, still holding her hand, his face was near to hers. Closer and closer yet, as by a spell, each gazing searchingly into the

other's glance, till their eyes could see no more for closeness, and their lips met in life's first virgin kiss,—in the glory and strength of a two-fold purity, each to each.

Far off at the other end of the room De Pretis struck a chord on the piano. They started at the sound.

"When?" whispered Nino, hurriedly.

"At midnight, under my window," she answered quickly, not thinking of anything better in her haste. "I will tell you then. You must go; my father will soon be here. No, not again," she protested. But he drew her to him, and said good-bye in his own manner. She lingered an instant, and tore herself away. De Pretis was playing loudly. Nino had to pass near him to go out, and the maestro nodded carelessly as he went by.

"Excuse me, maestro," said Hedwig, as Nino bowed himself out; "it was a question of arranging certain lessons."

"Do not mention it," said he, indifferently; "my time is yours, signorina. Shall we go through with this solfeggio once more?"

The good maestro did not seem greatly disturbed by the interruption. Hedwig wondered, dreamily, whether he had understood. It all seemed like a dream. The notes were upside down in her sight, and her voice sought strange minor keys unconsciously, as she vainly tried to concentrate her attention upon what she was doing.

"Signorina," said Ercole at last, "what you sing is very pretty, but it is not exactly what is written here. I fear you are tired."

"Perhaps so," said she. "Let us not sing any more to-day." Ercole shut up the music and rose. She gave him her hand, a thing she had never done before; and it was unconscious now, as everything she did seemed to be. There is a point when dreaming gets the mastery, and appears infinitely more real than the things we touch.

Nino, meanwhile, had descended the steps, expecting every moment to meet the count. As he went down the street, a closed carriage drove by with the Lira liveries. The old count was in it, but Nino stepped into the shadow of a door-

way to let the equipage pass, and was not seen. The wooden face of the old nobleman almost betrayed something akin to emotion. He was returning from the funeral, and it had pained him; for he had liked the wild baroness, in a fatherly, reproving way. But the sight of him sent a home thrust to Nino's heart.

"Her death is on my soul for ever," he muttered between his set teeth. Poor innocent boy, it was not his fault if she had loved him so much. Women have done things for great singers that they have not done for martyrs or heroes. It seems so certain that the voice that sings so tenderly is speaking to them individually. Music is such a fleeting, passionate thing that a woman takes it all to herself; how could he sing like that for any one else? And yet there is always some one for whom he does really pour out his heart, and all the rest are the dolls of life, to be looked at, and admired for their dress and complexion, and to laugh at when the fancy takes him to laugh; but not to love.

At midnight Nino was at his post, but he waited long and patiently for a sign. It was

past two, and he was thinking it hopeless to wait longer, when his quick ear caught the sound of a window moving on its hinges, and a moment later something fell at his feet with a sharp, metallic click. The night was dark and cloudy, so that the waning moon gave little light. He picked up the thing, and found a small pocket handkerchief wrapped about a minute pair of scissors, apparently to give it weight. He expected a letter, and groped on the damp pavement with his hands. Then he struck a match, shaded it from the breeze with his hand, and saw that the handkerchief was stained with ink and that the stains were letters, roughly printed to make them distinct. He hurried away to the light of a street lamp to read the strange missive.

CHAPTER X.

He went to the light and spread out the handkerchief. It was a small thing, of almost transparent stuff, with a plain "H. L." and a crown in the corner. The steel pen had torn the delicate fibres here and there.

"They know you have been here. I am watched. Keep away from the house till you hear."

That was all the message, but it told worlds. He knew from it that the count was informed of his visit, and he tortured himself by trying to imagine what the angry old man would do. His heart sank like a stone in his breast when he thought of Hedwig so imprisoned, guarded, made a martyr of, for his folly. He groaned aloud when he understood that it was in the power of her father to take her away suddenly and leave

no trace of their destination, and he cursed his haste and impetuosity in having shown himself inside the house. But with all this weight of trouble upon him, he felt the strength and indomitable determination within him which come only to a man who loves, when he knows he is loved again. He kissed the little handkerchief, and even the scissors she had used to weight it with, and he put them in his breast. But he stood irresolute, leaning against the lamp-post, as a man will who is trying to force his thoughts to overtake events, trying to shape the future out of the present. Suddenly he was aware of a tall figure in a fur coat standing near him on the sidewalk. He would have turned to go, but something about the stranger's appearance struck him so oddly that he stayed where he was and watched him.

The tall man searched for something in his pockets, and finally produced a cigarette, which he leisurely lighted with a wax match. As he did so his eyes fell upon Nino. The stranger was tall and very thin. He wore a pointed beard and a heavy moustache, which seemed almost dazzlingly white, as were the few locks

that appeared, neatly brushed over his temples, beneath his opera hat. His sanguine complexion, however, had all the freshness of youth, and his eyes sparkled merrily, as though amused at the spectacle of his nose, which was immense, curved, and polished, like an eagle's beak. He wore perfectly-fitting kid gloves, and the collar of his fur wrapper, falling a little open, showed that he was in evening dress.

It was so late—past two o'clock—that Nino had not expected anything more than a policeman or some homeless wanderer, when he raised his eyes to look on the stranger. He was fascinated by the strange presence of the aged dandy, for such he seemed to be, and returned his gaze boldly. He was still more astonished, however, when the old gentleman came close to him, and raised his hat, displaying, as he did so, a very high and narrow forehead, crowned with a mass of smooth white hair. There was both grace and authority in the courteous gesture, and Nino thought the old gentleman moved with an ease that matched his youthful complexion rather than his hoary locks.

"Signor Cardegna, the distinguished artist, if I mistake not?" said the stranger, with a peculiar foreign accent, the like of which Nino had never heard. He also raised his hat, extremely surprised that a chance passer-by should know him. He had not yet learned what it is to be famous. But he was far from pleased at being addressed in his present mood.

"The same, signore," he replied coldly. "How can I serve you?"

"You can serve the world you so well adorn better than by exposing your noble voice to the midnight damps and chills of this infernal—I would say, eternal—city," answered the other. "Forgive me. I am, not unnaturally, concerned at the prospect of losing even a small portion of the pleasure you know how to give to me and to many others."

"I thank you for your flattery," said Nino, drawing his cloak about him, "but it appears to me that my throat is my own, and whatever voice there may be in it. Are you a physician, signore? And pray why do you tell me that Rome is an infernal city?"

"I have had some experience of Rome, Signor Cardegna," returned the foreigner, with a peculiar smile, "and I hate no place so bitterly in all this world—save one. And as for my being a physician, I am an old man, a very singularly old man in fact, and I know something of the art of healing."

"When I need healing, as you call it," said Nino, rather scornfully, "I will inquire for you. Do you desire to continue this interview amid the 'damps and chills' of our 'infernal city'? If not, I will wish you good-evening."

"By no means," said the other, not in the least repulsed by Nino's coldness. "I will accompany you a little way, if you will allow me." Nino stared hard at the stranger, wondering what could induce him to take so much interest in a singer. Then he nodded gravely, and turned toward his home, inwardly hoping that his aggressive acquaintance lived in the opposite direction. But he was mistaken. The tall man blew a quantity of smoke through his nose and walked by his side. He strode over the pavement with a long, elastic step.

"I live not far from here," he said when they had gone a few steps, "and if the Signor Cardigna will accept of a glass of old wine and a good cigar I shall feel highly honoured." Somehow an invitation of this kind was the last thing Nino had expected or desired, least of all from a talkative stranger who seemed determined to make his acquaintance.

"I thank you, signore," he answered, "but I have supped, and I do not smoke."

"Ah—I forgot. You are a singer, and must of course be careful. That is perhaps the reason why you wander about the streets when the nights are dark and damp. But I can offer you something more attractive than liquor and tobacco. A great violinist lives with me,—a queer, nocturnal bird,—and if you will come he will be enchanted to play for you. I assure you he is a very good musician, the like of which you will hardly hear nowadays. He does not play in public any longer, from some odd fancy of his."

Nino hesitated. Of all instruments he loved the violin best, and in Rome he had had but little opportunity of hearing it well played.

Concerts were the rarest of luxuries to him, and violinists in Rome are rarer still.

"What is his name, signore?" he asked, unbending a little.

"You must guess that when you hear him," said the old gentleman, with a short laugh. "But I give you my word of honour he is a great musician. Will you come, or must I offer you still further attractions?"

"What might they be?" asked Nino.

"Nay; will you come for what I offer you? If the music is not good, you may go away again." Still Nino hesitated. Sorrowful and fearful of the future as he was, his love gnawing cruelly at his heart, he would have given the whole world for a strain of rare music if only he were not forced to make it himself. Then it struck him that this might be some pitfall. I would not have gone.

"Sir," he said at last, "if you meditate any foul play, I would advise you to retract your invitation. I will come, and I am well armed." He had my long knife about him somewhere. It is one of my precautions. But the stranger

laughed long and loud at the suggestion, so that his voice woke queer echoes in the silent street. Nino did not understand why he should laugh so much, but he found his knife under his cloak, and made sure it was loose in its leathern sheath. Presently the stranger stopped before the large door of an old palazzo,—every house is a palazzo that has an entrance for carriages,—and let himself in with a key. There was a lantern on the stone pavement inside, and seeing a light, Nino followed him boldly. The old gentleman took the lantern and led the way up the stairs, apologising for the distance and the darkness. At last they stopped, and, entering another door, found themselves in the stranger's apartment.

"A cardinal lives down-stairs," said he, as he turned up the light of a couple of large lamps that burned dimly in the room they had reached. "The secretary of a very holy order has his office on the other side of my landing, and altogether this is a very religious atmosphere. Pray take off your cloak; the room is warm."

Nino looked about him. He had expected to be ushered into some princely dwelling, for he

had judged his interlocutor to be some rich and eccentric noble, unless he were an erratic scamp. He was somewhat taken aback by the spectacle that met his eyes. The furniture was scant, and all in the style of the last century. The dust lay half an inch thick on the old gilded ornaments and chandeliers. A great pier-glass was cracked from corner to corner, and the metallic backing seemed to be scaling off behind. There were two or three open valises on the marble floor, which latter, however, seemed to have been lately swept. A square table was in the centre, also free from dust, and a few high-backed leathern chairs, studded with brass nails, were ranged about it. On the table stood one of the lamps, and the other was placed on a marble column in a corner, that once must have supported a bust, or something of the kind. Old curtains, moth-eaten and ragged with age, but of a rich material, covered the windows. Nino glanced at the open trunks on the floor, and saw that they contained a quantity of wearing apparel and the like. He guessed that his acquaintance had lately arrived.

"I do not often inhabit this den," said the old gentleman, who had divested himself of his furs, and now showed his thin figure arrayed in the extreme of full dress. A couple of decorations hung at his button-hole. "I seldom come here, and on my return, the other day, I found that the man I had left in charge was dead, with all his family, and the place has gone to ruin. That is always my luck," he added, with a little laugh.

"I should think he must have been dead some time," said Nino, looking about him. "There is a great deal of dust here."

"Yes, as you say, it is some years," returned his acquaintance, still laughing. He seemed a merry old soul, fifty years younger than his looks. He produced from a case a bottle of wine and two silver cups, and placed them on the table.

"But where is your friend, the violinist?" inquired Nino, who was beginning to be impatient; for except that the place was dusty and old, there was nothing about it sufficiently interesting to take his thoughts from the subject nearest his heart.

"I will introduce him to you," said the other, going to one of the valises and taking out a violin case, which he laid on the table and proceeded to open. The instrument was apparently of great age, small and well shaped. The stranger took it up and began to tune it.

"Do you mean to say that you are yourself the violinist?" he asked, in astonishment. But the stranger vouchsafed no answer, as he steadied the fiddle with his bearded chin and turned the pegs with his left hand, adjusting the strings.

Then, suddenly and without any preluding, he began to make music, and from the first note Nino sat enthralled and fascinated, losing himself in the wild sport of the tones. The old man's face became ashy white as he played, and his white hair appeared to stand away from his head. The long, thin fingers of his left hand chased each other in pairs and singly along the delicate strings, while the bow glanced in the lamplight as it dashed like lightning across the instrument, or remained almost stationary, quivering in his magic hold as quickly as the wings of the humming-bird strike the summer air. Some-

times he seemed to be tearing the heart from the old violin; sometimes it seemed to murmur soft things in his old ear, as though the imprisoned spirit of the music were pleading to be free on the wings of sound: sweet as love that is strong as death; feverish and murderous as jealousy that is as cruel as the grave; sobbing great sobs of a terrible death-song, and screaming in the outrageous frenzy of a furious foe; wailing thin cries of misery, too exhausted for strong grief; dancing again in horrid madness, as the devils dance over some fresh sinner they have gotten themselves for torture; and then at last, as the strings bent to the commanding bow, finding the triumph of a glorious rest in great, broad chords, splendid in depth and royal harmony, grand, enormous, and massive as the united choirs of heaven.

Nino was beside himself, leaning far over the table, straining eyes and ears to understand the wonderful music that made him drunk with its strength. As the tones ceased he sank back in his chair, exhausted by the tremendous effort of his senses. Instantly the old man recovered his

former appearance. With his hand he smoothed the thick white hair; the fresh colour came back to his cheeks; and as he tenderly laid his violin on the table, he was again the exquisitely dressed and courtly gentleman who had spoken to Nino in the street. The musician disappeared, and the man of the world returned. He poured wine into the plain silver cups, and invited Nino to drink; but the boy pushed the goblet away, and his strange host drank alone.

"You asked me for the musician's name," he said, with a merry twinkle in his eye, from which every trace of artistic inspiration had faded; "can you guess it now?" Nino seemed tongue-tied still, but he made an effort.

"I have heard of Paganini," he said, "but he died years ago."

"Yes, he is dead, poor fellow! I am not Paganini."

"I am at a loss, then," said Nino, dreamily. "I do not know the names of many violinists, but you must be so famous that I ought to know yours."

"No; how should you? I will tell you. I

am Benoni, the Jew." The tall man's eyes twinkled more brightly than ever. Nino stared at him, and saw that he was certainly of a pronounced Jewish type. His brown eyes were long and oriental in shape, and his nose was unmistakably Semitic.

"I am sorry to seem so ignorant," said Nino, blushing, "but I do not know the name. I perceive, however, that you are indeed a very great musician,—the greatest I ever heard." The compliment was perfectly sincere, and Benoni's face beamed with pleasure. He evidently liked praise.

"It is not extraordinary," he said, smiling. "In the course of a very long life it has been my only solace, and if I have some skill it is the result of constant study. I began life very humbly."

"So did I," said Nino, thoughtfully, "and I am not far from the humbleness yet."

"Tell me," said Benoni, with a show of interest, "where you come from, and why you are a singer."

"I was a peasant's child, an orphan, and the

good God gave me a voice. That is all I know about it. A kind-hearted gentleman, who once owned the estate where I was born, brought me up, and wanted to make a philosopher of me. But I wanted to sing, and so I did."

"Do you always do the things you want to do?" asked the other. "You look as though you might. You look like Napoleon,—that man always interested me. That is why I asked you to come and see me. I have heard you sing, and you are a great artist,—an additional reason. All artists should be brothers. Do you not think so?"

"Indeed, I know very few good ones," said Nino, simply; "and even among them I would like to choose before claiming relationship—personally. But Art is a great mother, and we are all her children."

"More especially we who began life so poorly, and love Art because she loves us." Benoni seated himself on the arm of one of the old chairs, and looked down across the worm-eaten table at the young singer. "We," he continued, "who have been wretchedly poor know better

than others that art is real, true, and enduring; medicine in sickness and food in famine; wings to the feet of youth and a staff for the steps of old age. Do you think I exaggerate, or do you feel as I do?" He paused for an answer, and poured more wine into his goblet.

"Oh, you know I feel as you do!" cried Nino, with rising enthusiasm.

"Very good; you are a genuine artist. What you have not felt yet you will feel hereafter. You have not suffered yet."

"You do not know about me," said Nino in a low voice. "I am suffering now."

Benoni smiled. "Do you call that suffering? Well, it is perhaps very real to you, though I do not know what it is. But art will help you through it all, as it has helped me."

"What were you?" asked Nino. "You say you were poor."

"Yes. I was a shoemaker, and a poor one at that. I have worn out more shoes than I ever made. But I was brought up to it for many years."

"You did not study music from a child, then?"

"No. But I always loved it; and I used to play in the evenings, when I had been cobbling all day long."

"And one day you found out you were a great artist and became famous. I see! What a strange beginning!" cried Nino.

"Not exactly that. It took a long time. I was obliged to leave my home, for other reasons, and then I played from door to door, and from town to town, for whatever coppers were thrown to me. I had never heard any good music, and so I played the things that came into my head. By and by people would make me stay with them awhile, for my music's sake. But I never stayed long."

"Why not?"

"I cannot tell you now," said Benoni, looking grave and almost sad: "it is a very long story. I have travelled a great deal, preferring a life of adventure. But of late money has grown to be so important a thing that I have given a series of great concerts, and have become rich enough to play for my own pleasure. Besides, though I travel so much, I like society, and I know many

people everywhere. To-night, for instance, though I have been in Rome only a week, I have been to a dinner party, to the theatre, to a reception, and to a ball. Everybody invites me as soon as I arrive. I am very popular,—and yet I am a Jew," he added, laughing in an odd way.

"But you are a merry Jew," said Nino, laughing too, "besides being a great genius. I do not wonder people invite you."

"It is better to be merry than sad," replied Benoni. "In the course of a long life I have found out that."

"You do not look so very old," said Nino. "How old are you?"

"That is a rude question," said his host, laughing. "But I will improvise a piece of music for you." He took his violin, and stood up before the broken pier-glass. Then he laid the bow over the strings and struck a chord. "What is that?" he asked, sustaining the sound.

"The common chord of A minor," answered Nino immediately.

"You have a good ear," said Benoni, still

playing the same notes, so that the constant monotony of them buzzed like a vexatious insect in Nino's hearing. Still the old man sawed the bow over the same strings without change. On and on, the same everlasting chord, till Nino thought he must go mad.

"It is intolerable; for the love of heaven, stop!" he cried, pushing back his chair and beginning to pace the room. Benoni only smiled, and went on as unchangingly as ever. Nino could bear it no longer, being very sensitive about sounds, and he made for the door.

"You cannot get out,—I have the key in my pocket," said Benoni, without stopping.

Then Nino became nearly frantic, and made at the Jew to wrest the instrument from his hands. But Benoni was agile, and eluded him, still playing vigorously the one chord, till Nino cried aloud, and sank in a chair, entirely overcome by the torture, that seemed boring its way into his brain like a corkscrew.

"This," said Benoni, the bow still sawing the strings, "is life without laughter. Now let us laugh a little, and see the effect."

It was indeed wonderful. With his instrument he imitated the sound of a laughing voice, high up above the monotonous chord: softly at first, as though far in the distance; then louder and nearer, the sustaining notes of the minor falling away one after the other and losing themselves, as the merriment gained ground on the sadness; till finally, with a burst of life and vitality of which it would be impossible to convey any idea, the whole body of mirth broke into a wild tarantella movement, so vivid and elastic and noisy that it seemed to Nino that he saw the very feet of the dancers, and heard the jolly din of the tambourine and the clattering, clappering click of the castanets.

"That," said Benoni, suddenly stopping, "is life with laughter, be it ever so sad and monotonous before. Which do you prefer?"

"You are the greatest artist in the world!" cried Nino, enthusiastically; "but I should have been a raving madman if you had played that chord any longer."

"Of course," said Benoni, "and I should have gone mad if I had not laughed. Poor Schumann,

you know, died insane because he fancied he always heard one note droning in his ears."

"I can understand that," said Nino. "But it is late, and I must be going home. Forgive my rudeness and reluctance to come with you. I was moody and unhappy. You have given me more pleasure than I can tell you."

"It will seem little enough to-morrow, I dare say," replied Benoni. "That is the way with pleasures. But you should get them all the same, when you can, and grasp them as tightly as a drowning man grasps a straw. Pleasures and money, money and pleasures."

Nino did not understand the tone in which his host made this last remark. He had learned different doctrines from me.

"Why do you speak so selfishly, after showing that you can give pleasure so freely, and telling me that we are all brothers?" he asked.

"If you are not in a hurry, I will explain to you that money is the only thing in this world worth having," said Benoni, drinking another cup of the wine, which appeared to have no effect whatever on his brain.

"Well?" said Nino, curious to hear what he had to say.

"In the first place, you will allow that from the noblest moral standpoint a man's highest aim should be to do good to his fellow-creatures? Yes, you allow that. And to do the greatest possible good to the greatest possible number? Yes, you allow that also. Then, I say, other things being alike, a good man will do the greatest possible amount of good in the world when he has the greatest possible amount of money. The more money, the more good; the less money, the less good. Of course money is only the means to the end, but nothing tangible in the world can ever be anything else. All art is only a means to the exciting of still more perfect images in the brain; all crime is a means to the satisfaction of passion, or avarice which is itself a king-passion; all good itself is a means to the attainment of heaven. Everything is bad or good in the world except art, which is a thing separate, though having good and bad results. But the attainment of heaven is the best object to keep in view. To that end, do the most good;

and to do it, get the most money. Therefore, as a means, money is the only thing in the world worth having, since you can most benefit humanity by it, and consequently be the most sure of going to heaven when you die. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly," said Nino, "provided a man is himself good."

"It is very reprehensible to be bad," said Benoni, with a smile.

"What a ridiculous truism!" said Nino, laughing outright.

"Very likely," said the other. "But I never heard any preacher, in any country, tell his congregation anything else. And people always listen with attention. In countries where rain is entirely unknown, it is not a truism to say that 'when it rains it is damp.' On the contrary, in such countries that statement would be regarded as requiring demonstration, and once demonstrated, it would be treasured and taught as an interesting scientific fact. Now it is precisely the same with congregations of men. They were never bad, and never can be; in fact, they doubt, in their dear innocent hearts, whether

they know what a real sin is. Consequently they listen with interest to the statement that sin is bad, and promise themselves that if ever that piece of information should be unexpectedly needed by any of their friends, they will remember it."

"You are a satirist, Signor Benoni," said Nino.

"Anything you like," returned the other. "I have been called worse names than that, in my time. So much for heaven and the prospect of it. But a gentleman has arisen in a foreign country who says that there is no heaven, anywhere, and that no one does good except in the pursuit of pleasure here or hereafter. But as his hereafter is nowhere, disregard it in the argument, and say that man should only do, or actually does, everything solely for the sake of pleasure here; say that pleasure is good, so long as it does not interfere with the pleasures of others, and good is pleasure. Money may help a man to more of it, but pleasure is the thing. Well, then, my young brother artist, what did I say?—'money and pleasure, pleasure and money.' The means are there; and as, of course, you are

good, like everybody else, and desire pleasure, you will get to heaven hereafter, if there is such a place; and if not, you will get the next thing to it, which is a paradise on earth." Having reached the climax, Signor Benoni lit a cigarette, and laughed his own peculiar laugh.

Nino shuddered involuntarily at the hideous sophistry. For Nino is a good boy, and believes very much in heaven, as well as in a couple of other places. Benoni's quick brown eyes saw the movement, and understood it, for he laughed longer yet, and louder.

"Why do you laugh like that? I see nothing to laugh at. It is very bitter and bad to hear all this that you say. I would rather hear your music. You are badly off, whether you believe in heaven or not. For if you do, you are not likely to get there; and if you do not believe in it, you are a heretic, and will be burned for ever and ever."

"Not so badly answered, for an artist; and in a few words, too," said Benoni, approvingly. "But, my dear boy, the trouble is that I shall not get to heaven either way, for it is my great

misfortune to be already condemned to everlasting flames."

"No one is that," said Nino, gravely.

"There are some exceptions, you know," said Benoni.

"Well," answered the young man thoughtfully, "of course there is the Wandering Jew, and such tales, but nobody believes in him."

"Good-night," said Benoni. "I am tired and must go to bed."

Nino found his way out alone, but carefully noted the position of the palazzo before he went home through the deserted streets. It was four in the morning.

CHAPTER XI.

EARLY in the morning after Nino's visit to Signor Benoni, De Pretis came to my house, wringing his hands and making a great trouble and noise. I had not yet seen Nino, who was sound asleep, though I could not imagine why he did not wake. But De Pretis was in such a temper that he shook the room and everything in it, as he stamped about the brick floor. It was not long before he had told me the cause of his trouble. He had just received a formal note from the Graf von Lira, inclosing the amount due to him for lessons, and dispensing with his services for the future.

Of course this was the result of the visit Nino had so rashly made; it all came out afterwards, and I will not now go through the details that De Pretis poured out, when we only half knew the truth. The count's servant who admitted

head, just visible through the crack of the door. "A pretty mess you have made with your ridiculous love affair! Here am I——"

"I see you are," retorted Nino; "and do not call any affair of mine ridiculous, or I will throw you out of the window. Wait a moment!" With that he slammed his door in the maestro's face, and went on with his dressing. For a few minutes De Pretis raved at his ease, venting his wrath on me. Then Nino came out.

"Now, then," said he, preparing for a tussle, "what is the matter, my dear maestro?" but Ercole had expended most of his fury already.

"The matter!" he grumbled. "The matter is that I have lost an excellent pupil through you. Count Lira says he does not require my services any longer, and the man who brought the note says they are going away."

"Diavolo!" said Nino, running his fingers through his curly black hair, "it is indeed serious. Where are they going?"

"How should I know?" asked De Pretis, angrily. "I care much more about losing the lesson than about where they are going. I shall

not follow them, I promise you. I cannot take the basilica of St. Peter about with me in my pocket, can I?"

And so he was angry at first, and at length he was pacified, and finally he advised Nino to discover immediately where the count and his daughter were going; and, if it were to any great capital, to endeavour to make a contract to sing there. Lent came early that year, and Nino was free at the end of Carnival,—not many days longer to wait. This was the plan that had instantly formed itself in Nino's brain. De Pretis is really a most obliging man, but one cannot wonder that he should be annoyed at the result of Nino's four months' courtship under such great difficulties, when it seemed that all their efforts had led only to the sudden departure of his lady-love. As for me, I advised Nino to let the whole matter drop then and there. I told him he would soon get over his foolish passion, and that a statue like Hedwig could never suffer anything, since she could never feel. But he glared at me, and did as he liked, just as he always has done.

The message on the handkerchief that Nino

had received the night before warned him to keep away from the Palazzo Carmandola. Nino reflected that this warning was probably due to Hedwig's anxiety for his personal safety, and he resolved to risk anything rather than remain in ignorance of her destination. It must be a case of giving some signal. But this evening he had to sing at the theatre, and therefore, without more ado, he left us and went to bed again, where he stayed until twelve o'clock. Then he went to rehearsal, arriving an hour behind time, at least, a matter which he treated with the coolest indifference. After that he got a pound of small shot, and amused himself with throwing a few at a time at the kitchen window from the little court at the back of our house, where the well is. It seemed a strangely childish amusement for a great singer.

Having sung successfully through his opera that night, he had supper with us, as usual, and then went out. Of course he told me afterwards what he did. He went to his old post under the windows of the Palazzo Carmandola, and as soon as all was dark he began to throw small shot up at Hedwig's window. He now profited by his

practice in the afternoon, for he made the panes rattle with the little bits of lead, several times. At last he was rewarded. Very slowly the window opened, and Hedwig's voice spoke in a low tone:

"Is it you?"

"Ah, dear one! Can you ask?" began Nino.

"Hush! I am still locked up. We are going away,—I cannot tell where."

"When, dearest love?"

"I cannot tell. What *shall* we do?" very tearfully.

"I will follow you immediately; only let me know when and where."

"If you do not hear by some other means, come here to-morrow night. I hear steps. Go at once."

"Good-night, dearest," he murmured; but the window was already closed, and the fresh breeze that springs up after one o'clock blew from the air the remembrance of the loving speech that had passed upon it.

On the following night he was at his post, and again threw the shot against the pane for a

signal. After a long time Hedwig opened the window very cautiously.

"Quick!" she whispered down to him, "go! They are all awake," and she dropped something heavy and white. Perhaps she added some word, but Nino would not tell me, and never would read me the letter. But it contained the news that Hedwig and her father were to leave Rome for Paris on the following morning; and ever since that night Nino has worn upon his little finger a plain gold ring,—I cannot tell why, and he says he found it.

The next day he ascertained from the porter of the Palazzo Carmandola that the count and contessina, with their servants, had actually left Rome that morning for Paris. From that moment he was sad as death, and went about his business heavily, being possessed of but one idea, namely, to sign an engagement to sing in Paris as soon as possible. In that wicked city the opera continues through Lent, and after some haggling, in which De Pretis insisted on obtaining for Nino the most advantageous terms, the contract was made out and signed.

I see very well that unless I hurry myself I shall never reach the most important part of this story, which is after all the only part worth telling. I am sure I do not know how I can ever tell it so quickly, but I will do my best, and you must have a little patience; for though I am not old, I am not young, and Nino's departure for Paris was a great shock to me, so that I do not like to remember it, and the very thought of it sickens me. If you have ever had any education, you must have seen an experiment in which a mouse is put in a glass jar, and all the air is drawn away with a pump, so that the poor little beast languishes and rolls pitifully on its side, gasping and wheezing with its tiny lungs for the least whiff of air. That is just how I felt when Nino went away. It seemed as though I could not breathe in the house or in the streets, and the little rooms at home were so quiet that one might hear a pin fall, and the cat purring through the closed doors. Nino left at the beginning of the last ten days of Carnival, when the opera closed, so that it was soon Lent; and everything is quieter then.

But before he left us there was noise enough and bustle of preparation, and I did not think I should miss him; for he always was making music, or walking about, or doing something to disturb me just at the very moment when I was most busy with my books. Mariuccia, indeed, would ask me from time to time what I should do when Nino was gone, as if she could foretell what I was to feel. I suppose she knew I was used to him, after fourteen years of it, and would be inclined to black humours for want of his voice. But she could not know just what Nino is to me, nor how I look on him as my own boy. These peasants are quick-witted and foolish; they guess a great many things better than I could, and then reason on them like idiots.

Nino himself was glad to go. I could see his face grow brighter as the time approached; and though he appeared to be more successful than ever in his singing, I am sure that he cared nothing for the applause he got, and thought only of singing as well as he could for the love of it. But when it came to the parting we were left alone.

"Messer Cornelio," he said, looking at me affectionately, "I have something to say to you to-night, before I go away."

"Speak, then, my dear boy," I answered, "for no one hears us."

"You have been very good to me. A father could not have loved me better, and such a father as I had could not have done a thousandth part what you have done for me. I am going out into the world for a time, but my home is here, —or rather, where my home is will always be yours. You have been my father, and I will be your son; and it is time you should give up your professorship. No, not that you are at all old; I do not mean that."

"No, indeed," said I, "I should think not."

"It would be much more proper if you retired into an elegant leisure, so that you might write as many books as you desire, without wearing yourself out in teaching those students every day. Would you not like to go back to Serveti?"

"Serveti!—ah, beautiful, lost Serveti, with its castle and good vine-lands!"

"You shall have it again before long, my

father," he said. He had never called me father before, the dear boy! I suppose it was because he was going away. But Serveti again! The thing was impossible, and I said so.

"It is not impossible," he answered, placidly. "Successful singers make enough money in a year to buy Serveti. A year is soon passed. But now let us go to the station, or I shall not be in time for the train."

"God bless you, Nino mio," I said, as I saw him off. It seemed to me that I saw two or three Ninos. But the train rolled away and took them all from me,—the ragged little child who first came to me, the strong-limbed, dark-eyed boy with his scales and trills and enthusiasm, and the full-grown man with the face like the great emperor, mightily triumphing in his art and daring in his love. They were all gone in a moment, and I was left alone on the platform of the station, a very sorrowful and weak old man. Well, I will not think about that day.

The first I heard of Nino was by a letter he wrote me from Paris, a fortnight after he had left me. It was characteristic of him, being full

of eager questions about home and De Pretis and Mariuccia and Rome. Two things struck me in his writing. In the first place, he made no mention of the count or Hedwig, which led me to suppose that he was recovering from his passion, as boys do when they travel. And secondly, he had so much to say about me that he forgot all about his engagement, and never even mentioned the theatre. On looking carefully through the letter again, I found he had written across the top the words "Rehearsals satisfactory." That was all.

It was not long after the letter came, however, that I was very much frightened by receiving a telegram, which must have cost several francs to send all that distance. By this he told me that he had no clue to the whereabouts of the Liras, and he implored me to make inquiries and discover where they had gone. He added that he had appeared in *Faust* successfully. Of course he would succeed. If a singer can please the Romans, he can please anybody. But it seemed to me that if he had received a very especially flattering reception he would have said so. I

went to see De Pretis, whom I found at home over his dinner. We put our heads together and debated how we might discover the Paris address of the Graf von Lira. In a great city like that it was no wonder Nino could not find them; but De Pretis hoped that some of his pupils might be in correspondence with the contessina, and would be willing to give the requisite directions for reaching her. But days passed, and a letter came from Nino written immediately after sending the telegram, and still we had accomplished nothing. The letter merely amplified the telegraphic message.

"It is no use," I said to De Pretis. "And besides, it is much better that he should forget all about it."

"You do not know that boy," said the maestro, taking snuff. And he was quite right, as it turned out.

Suddenly Nino wrote from London. He had made an arrangement, he said, by which he was allowed to sing there for three nights only. The two managers had settled it between them, being friends. He wrote very despondently, saying

that although he had been far more fortunate in his appearances than he had expected, he was in despair at not having found the contessina, and had accepted the arrangement which took him to London because he had hopes of finding her there. On the day which brought me this letter I had a visitor. Nino had been gone nearly a month. It was in the afternoon, towards sunset, and I was sitting in the old green arm-chair watching the goldfinch in his cage, and thinking sadly of the poor dear baroness, and of my boy, and of many things. The bell rang, and Mariuccia brought me a card in her thick fingers which were black from peeling potatoes, so that the mark of her thumb came off on the white pasteboard. The name on the card was "Baron Ahasuerus Benoni," and there was no address. I told her to show the signore into the sitting-room, and he was not long in coming. I immediately recognised the man Nino had described, with his unearthly freshness of complexion, his eagle nose, and his snow-white hair. I rose to greet him.

"Signor Grandi," he said, "I trust you will

pardon my intrusion. I am much interested in your boy, the great tenor."

"Sir," I replied, "the visit of a gentleman is never an intrusion. Permit me to offer you a chair." He sat down, and crossed one thin leg over the other. He was dressed in the height of the fashion; he wore patent-leather shoes, and carried a light ebony cane with a silver head. His hat was perfectly new, and so smoothly brushed that it reflected a circular image of the objects in the room. But he had a certain dignity that saved his foppery from seeming ridiculous.

"You are very kind," he answered. "Perhaps you would like to hear some news of Signor Cardegna,—your boy, for he is nothing else."

"Indeed," I said, "I should be very glad. Has he written to you, baron?"

"Oh, no! We are not intimate enough for that. But I ran on to Paris the other day, and heard him three or four times, and had him to supper at Bignon's. He is a great genius, your boy, and has won all hearts."

"That is a compliment of weight from so dis-

tinguished a musician as yourself," I answered; for, as you know, Nino had told me all about his playing. Indeed, the description was his, which is the reason why it is so enthusiastic.

"Yes," said Benoni, "I am a great traveller, and often go to Paris for a day or two. I know every one there. Cardegna had a perfect ovation. All the woman sent him flowers, and all the men asked him to dinner."

"Pardon my curiosity," I interrupted, "but as you know every one in Paris, could you inform me whether Count von Lira and his daughter are there at present? He is a retired Prussian officer." Benoni stretched out one of his long arms and ran his fingers along the keys of the piano without striking them. He could just reach so far from where he sat. He gave no sign of intelligence, and I felt sure that Nino had not questioned him.

"I know them very well," he said, presently, "but I thought they were here."

"No, they left suddenly for Paris a month ago."

"I can very easily find out for you," said

Benoni, his bright eyes turning on me with a searching look. "I can find out from Lira's banker, who is probably also mine. What is the matter with that young man? He is as sad as Don Quixote."

"Nino? He is probably in love," I said, rather indiscreetly.

"In love? Then of course he is in love with Mademoiselle de Lira, and has gone to Paris to find her, and cannot. That is why you ask me." I was so much astonished at the quickness of his guesswork that I stared, open-mouthed.

"He must have told you!" I exclaimed at last.

"Nothing of the kind. In the course of a long life I have learned to put two and two together, that is all. He is in love, he is your boy, and you are looking for a certain young lady. It is as clear as day." But in reality he had guessed the secret long before.

"Very well," said I, humbly, but doubting him, all the same, "I can only admire your perspicacity. But I would be greatly obliged if you would find out where they are, those good

people. You seem to be a friend of my boy's, baron. Help him, and he will be grateful to you. It is not such a very terrible thing that a great artist should love a noble's daughter, after all, though I used to think so." Benoni laughed, that strange laugh which Nino had described,—a laugh that seemed to belong to another age.

"You amuse me with your prejudices about nobility," he said, and his brown eyes flashed and twinkled again. "The idea of talking about nobility in this age! You might as well talk of the domestic economy of the Garden of Eden."

"But you are yourself a noble—a baron," I objected.

"Oh, I am anything you please," said Benoni. "Some idiot made a baron of me the other day because I lent him money and he could not pay it. But I have some right to it, after all, for I am a Jew. The only real nobles are Welshmen and Jews. You cannot call anything so ridiculously recent as the European upper classes a nobility. Now I go straight back to the creation of the world, like all my countrymen. The Hibernians get a factitious reputation for anti-

quity by saying that Eve married an Irishman after Adam died, and that is about as much claim as your European nobles have to respectability. Bah! I know their beginnings,—very small indeed."

"You also seem to have strong prejudices on the subject," said I, not wishing to contradict a guest in my house.

"So strong that it amounts to having no prejudices at all. Your boy wants to marry a noble damosel. In Heaven's name let him do it. Let us manage it amongst us. Love is a grand thing. I have loved several women all their lives. Do not look surprised. I am a very old man; they have all died, and at present I am not in love with anybody. I suppose it cannot last long, however. I loved a woman once on a time"—Benoni paused. He seemed to be on the verge of a soliloquy, and his strange, bright face, which seemed illuminated always with a deathless vitality, became dreamy and looked older. But he recollected himself and rose to go. His eye caught sight of the guitar that hung on the wall.

"Ah," he cried suddenly, "music is better than love, for it lasts; let us make music." He dropped his hat and stick and seized the instrument. In an instant it was tuned, and he began to perform the most extraordinary feats of agility with his fingers that I ever beheld. Some of it was very beautiful, and some of it very sad and wild, but I understood Nino's enthusiasm. I could have listened to the old guitar in his hands for hours together,—I, who care little for music; and I watched his face. He stalked about the room with the thing in his hands, in a sort of wild frenzy of execution. His features grew ashy pale, and his smooth white hair stood out wildly from his head. He looked, then, more than a hundred years old, and there was a sadness and a horror about him that would have made the stones cry aloud for pity. I could not believe he was the same man. At last he was tired, and stopped.

"You are a great artist, baron," I said. "Your music seems to affect you much."

"Ah, yes, it makes me feel like other men for the time," said he, in a low voice. "Did you

know that Paganini always practised on the guitar? It is true. Well, I will find out about the Liras for you in a day or two, before I leave Rome again."

I thanked him and he took his leave.

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